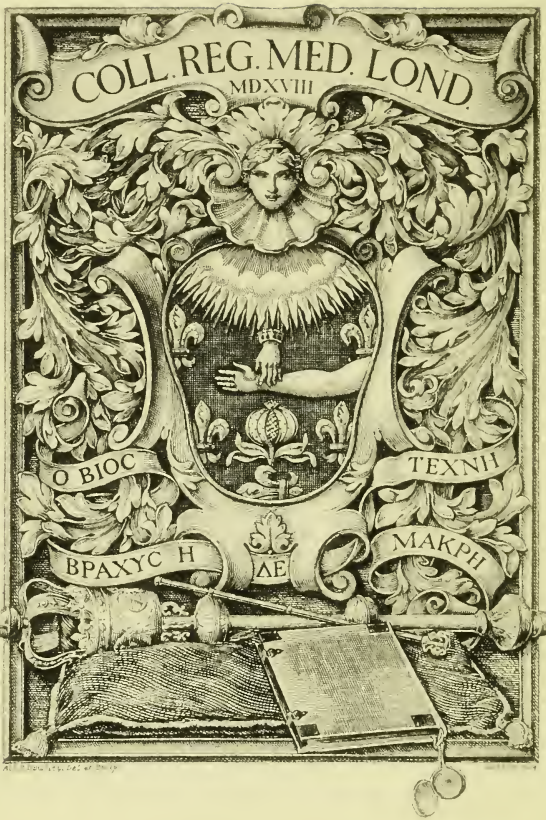
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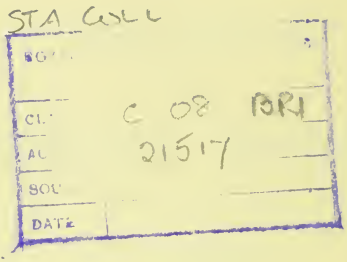
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Poetical Works
of
ROBERT BRIDGES

Volume III



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VOLUME THE THIRD CONTAINING

THE FIRST PART OF NERO . . . p. 1

ACHILLES IN SCYROS 179

NOTES 261

LIST OF PREVIOUS EDITIONS

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THE FIRST PART OF NERO.

1. *NERO. An historical Tragedy of the first part of the reign of the emperor Nero. Published by Ewd. Bumpus. London*, 1885. 4*to.*

ACHILLES IN SCYROS.

1. *ACHILLES IN SCYROS. A drama in a mixed manner. Published by Ewd. Bumpus. London*, 1890. 4*to.*
2. *ACHILLES IN SCYROS. Uniform with* Shorter Poems (I). *George Bell & Sons*, 1892.

*

THE FIRST PART
OF THE
HISTORY
OF
NERO

A HISTORICAL
TRAGEDY

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

NERO.

BRITANNICUS . . . . . *stepson to Agrippina.*

BURRUS . . . . . *praetorian prefect.*

SENECA . . . . . *tutor to Nero.*

LUCAN, the poet, nephew to Seneca . . }
OTHO }
PETRONIUS } *gentlemen of Rome* . . } *friends of Nero.*

PALLAS . . . *master of the imperial household.*

TIGELLINUS . . . . *successor to Pallas.*

THRASEA, a Stoic . . . . }
PRISCUS . . . . . } *honest senators.*

ANICETUS . . . . . *an admiral.*

PARIS . . . . *a player, favourite of Nero.*

SELEUCUS . . . . . *an astrologer.*

Messengers, Servants, &c.

AGRIPPINA AUGUSTA. . . *mother to Nero.*

OCTAVIA . . . *wife to Nero, sister to Britannicus.*

POPPÆA . . . . *wife to Otho, loved of Nero.*

DOMITIA. . . . *sister-in-law to Agrippina.*

FULVIA . . . . . *attendant on Agrippina.*

Maids, &c.

Scene. The first four acts are laid in ROME; the fifth is at BAIÆ.

NERO

ACT · I

SCENE · 1

On the Palatine. *THRASEA & PRISCUS.*

THRASEA.

IF you ask my advice then, it is silence. You are yet new to the senate, and must learn to give your opinion with least offence.

PRISCUS.

Can you mean this?

Thr. Yes—it is my serious advice.

Pr. Now, unless it were the silence of Brutus . . .

Thr. Hush, hush! Were this repeated, there is no greater peril than that word of yours.

Pr. But to you I know I may speak freely.

Thr. What know you of me?

Pr. I know Thrasea is brave, and resents his country's wrongs; that he has insight to see that liberty was never more outraged than now.

Thr. Believe me, sir, this tale of things being at their worst is common to all times. Your judgment has gone astray upon a contempt for Cæsar's follies, or a hatred of his mother's crimes. Measure Nero but by what he has already done, and you may even find cause for congratulation. 19

Pr. We shall be ruled like the Britons by a Queen.

Thr. O nay. It is not possible that Nero will suffer Agrippina's ambition to take such a place. 'Tis already a quarrel between them, and Seneca declares for him.

Pr. Then, I ask you, may there not be found in this quarrel an opportunity to bring in Britannicus? Now he is of age, he can no longer be held disqualified.

Thr. There is no question of qualification or of claim. 28

Pr. How so? The late emperor Claudius in his will mentioned Britannicus for his successor, as being his own son . . . . . .

Thr. May be. But then, sir, his empress made away with both him and his will; and the Roman people chose for Cæsar the son of the murderess, rather than the heir of the idiot they were glad to be rid of. Since which day Nero is as truly our Cæsar as Britannicus could

ever have been. Those who swore to Nero will remain by him; as 'tis well they should, else were no stability.

Pr. Shall we then do nothing?

Thr. You take things by the wrong handle. Let us make the best of what we have. Our Cæsar is the pupil of a philosopher and guided in everything by his master's counsels.

Pr. You are very tolerant and hopeful.

Thr. Try and be so too, and I shall wish to see more of you. If you will visit my house, you will indeed be most welcome and may find congenial company. Only no more of Brutus.

Pr. Thank you for your kindness, if it is an earnest of your confidence—On another occasion . . .

Thr. O we will find many. (*Shouts heard.*) What is that? (*More shouts.*) It must be Cæsar: he is coming this way. Be not seen talking with me: go you that way: I will remain. Farewell.

Pr. Farewell, Thrasea. [*Exit.*

Thr. Young blood, hot blood and true:
Yet is his energetic patriotism
Useless,—nay, like a weapon out of date,
Looks not to be a warlike weapon more.
I think in me it had been truer wisdom,
Knowing the forces of this drowning time,
To have said outright—Good, honest Priscus,

Be good no longer, let thine honesty
Rot, it can stead thee nothing; there's no man
Will be the better for it; there's no field
Where thou canst exercise it, not a place
In all the world where in secure possession
Thou mayst retire with it: cast it away;
For 'tis a burden far beyond thy freight.
If thou wilt swim at all, swim with the times,
An empty bottom on a shallow tide:
Be that thy seamanship—No; I am bold to say
Our virtue hath the topmost vaunt of honour;
Seeing we are true to it in spite of shame,
When its incompetence before the world
Gives it the lie; nor can the fawning curs,
That bask in Cæsar's sunshine, when they mock us,
Dream that we wish them other than they are.
I give them joy. See here is folly's king,
The hare-brained boy to whom injurious fortune
Has given the throne and grandeur of the world:
Now if I bow my head 'tis in thy game,
Ridiculous fate; and my soul laughs at thee.

[*Retires aside.*

Enter Nero, Otho, Lucan, Tigellinus, and Paris.

NERO.

This is the place: enlarge it on this side
To take in all the hill. That house of Rufus

That blocks the way must down, and all the piles
On the south slope. Now say, is't fine or no?

LUCAN.

Magnificent.

OTHO.

It shows the mind of Cæsar.

TIGELLINUS.

Splendid.

Ner. At least the best: we still regret
A better than the best; and I can see
These possibilities. Think if the hill
Were raised some hundred feet, till it o'ertopped
The Capitol—eh! lords. And so 'twere best;
But still 'twill pass for good.

Luc. 'Twill be a palace
For site and size the first in all the world.

Ner. To kill the Jews' brag of Jerusalem?

Oth. I think it.

Ner. You, my friends, who know my scheme,
May mete and judge my general scope in this,
A sample of my temper coined and uttered
For the world's model, that all men's endeavours
May rise with mine to have all things at best,
Not only for myself but for the world;
Riches and joy and heart's content for all.

It may be done, and who should do it but I?
See now my years at best, my youth and strength
With form and gifts agreeing, and my power, ...
Know'st thou my power?—Oh! Otho, I tell thee
The Cæsars which have been have never known
What 'tis to be full Cæsar. Dost thou think?
There's nothing good on earth but may be won
With power and money; and I have them both;
Ay, and the will.

Oth. Much may be done, no doubt.

Ner. Much! Why there's nothing, man, may not be done.

The curse of life is of our own devising,
Born of man's ignorance and selfishness.
He wounds his happiness against a cage
Of his own make, and only waits the word
For one to set his door open,—and look,
Having his liberty is he not glad
As heaven's birds are?—Now when fate's ordinance
Sends him a liberator, ay, and one
Not to cajole or preach, but, will or nill,
Who'll force him forth and crush up his old cage,
With all who would hang back and skulk therein,
How shall he not be happy?

Luc. This shall be
The world's last crown, by man with utmost power

Endowed to drive him to the good he shuns.

Ner. Ay. Be all human hopes summed up in mine
And reach their goal. I say there shall be peace,
There shall be plenty, pleasure, and content:
The god on earth shall work the good whereof
The folly of man hath baulked the gods in heaven:
And good that men desire shall be as common
As ills they now repine at. When I say
There shall be justice, see, even at my word
Injustice is no more.

PARIS.

The house of Rufus,
Standing on justice there, will mar thy palace.

Ner. Fool. Why, I say to Rufus—I am Cæsar,
And need thy house.—Says he—It cost my sire
Ten million sesterces.—A trifle that,
Say I, and give him twenty: and down it goes.
Is not this more than justice?

Par. Ay, 'tis power.

Ner. Thou quibbling meddler, learn this point of wit,
To keep thy sphere; answer in that: last night
Sang I divinely? Wert thou envious
When I put on the lion's skin, and did
The choice of Hercules?

Par. Most mighty Cæsar,

I wished that I had asses ears to hear;
Mine are not long enough.
Ner. Plague on thy jesting.
See static virtue stalks with folded arm
To set thee down. [*Thrasea comes forward.*
Thr. Hail, Cæsar!
Ner. Thy opinion,
Thrasea, come, thy opinion. What dost thou think
If I extend my palace to take in
The hill whereon we stand?
Thr. The plan no doubt
Is worthy of the site, and for the site,
Why, 'tis the darling spot of Rome.
Ner. Well said.
Stay. I would ask my fellow senator
Wherefore he left the house three days ago
Without his voice or vote.
Thr. I judged the time
Unmeet to speak; and, for my vote, the senate
Was of one mind: a vote was of no count.
Ner. Thou show'dst a sense against us in not voting.
Thr. That must thou look for, Cæsar, in the senate.
Ner. Well, I would have thee speak. We are not full
Without thy voice: nay more, such conduct makes
The senate but a name; for times have been
When silence was well justified by fear.

Now we court criticism, ay, and look ill
On those that grudge their approbation.
Thr. Cæsar commands my service and my praise;
I shall not lack.
Ner. We look for much from thee.
Thr. Long live your majesty. [*Exit.*
Ner. There's something good
In that man, Otho; spite of his dry mien
And Stoic fashion.
Oth. Nay, I like him not.
He's hardly flesh and blood. Old Seneca
Is stiff and prosy enough; but if you pinch him,
You find he yields, shows softness here and there.
This man is merely stone, foursquare by rule.
Ner. Do you despise divine philosophy?
Oth. Well, as I take it, all philosophy
Is questionable guessing, but the sense
A man grows up with bears the stamp of nature.
Ner. How mean you that?
Oth. At best this fine-spun system
Is but a part of man's experience
Drawn out to contradiction of the rest.
'Tis a fool's wisdom.
Luc. 'Tis a form of pleasure.
Oth. True. Though there be no theory of life
That's worth a button, yet the search for one

Seems to content some men better than life.

Ner. Call him not fool, Otho!

Oth. Unless I wrong him,
I speak as well of him as he of me.
Or if he say nothing, his guarded manner
Covers, be sure, a more unkind contempt.

Par. (*apeing Thr.*). That must thou look for, Cæsar, in the senate.

Tig. Ha! ha! Excellent!

Ner. Paris would make a senator.

Oth. Well, give me life.

Ner. Ay, that is wisdom. Live.
Enjoy the hour; which minds me, for to-night
I have time well disposed: we sup with Actè;
She will inaugurate the new pavilion,
And after, there are masks and clubs provided.
Thou'lt join us, eh!

Oth. With all my heart.

Ner. (*to Tig. and Luc.*). And you.
And you. And, Paris, see Petronius comes,
And Anicetus. Hence, and bid them now.

[*Exit Paris.*

Good news for them I think; pleasure in store.
We'll make a merry night. Now tell me, Otho,
You're a good judge, have you ever seen a woman
Fit to compare with Actè?

Oth. I say no.

Ner. I mean not, man, for what our grandsires praised,
Who knew no better; I mean the perfect art
Which makes each moment feverous.

Oth. I know none.

Ner. 'Tis spoke as if thy judgment or thy envy
Grudged me the word.

Oth. Nay, Cæsar.

Ner. O, I know
Thou'rt a good husband, thy good wife commands thee.

Oth. Say, my good fortune, Cæsar.

Ner. Now if thy boast
Be true as it is rare, thy lady's presence
Would add much spirit to our gaieties.
I have never seen Poppæa, say that to-night
Thou bring her.

Oth. In this thing, for friendship's sake,
Hold me excused.

Ner. Nay, no constraint; thy wish
Is all in all. Wrong me not; I would not have,
And least to thee, my pleasures a command;
But my commands are pleasures. Let us go.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE · 2

A room in the palace. Enter OCTAVIA *and* BRITANNICUS.

BRITANNICUS.

Why art thou weeping, dearest? Has Nero been
Again unkind?

OCTAVIA.

Most unkind.

Br. Weep not so.
Octavia, weep not so.
Count but my tears as thine, so shall my pity
Comfort thy wrongs. Nay, wert thou not my sister,
How must I feel to see so base a rival
Honoured before thyself in Cæsar's palace!
Why even his mother could not grant him that
Unmoved, but wept with rage: while he himself,
I saw, was touched with shame.

Oct. Hush, hush! nay, 'tis not that;
I mind not that: at least they tell me now
I must not mind; and since he never loved me
It matters little. 'Tis not that at all.

Br. Then something fresh; what more?

Oct. I scarce dare tell.

What hast thou said or done, Britannicus,
That so could anger him?
Br. Ah! is't with me then
He is angry? Dost thou weep for me?
Oct. For both.
Br. Now tell me all, sister.
Oct. O, 'tis the worst.
Here as I sat this morning strode he in,
More fired with rage than ever I have seen him,
More like his wicked mother, when her fury
Has made me tremble. All he said I heard not,
But this, that I, his wife, had turned against him
To plot with thee, and led thee on to boast
That being of age thou wert the rightful heir,
And more: what is his meaning?
Br. 'Tis his spite
To seek my fault in thee.
Oct. Nay, that were nothing.
Brother, I fear thou wilt be sent from Rome.
He dare not face the truth. He cannot brook
Thy title: thou must go, ay, thou wilt go
And leave me in my prison.
Br. 'Twas last night
I vexed him suddenly in his cups, but thought
'Twould be as soon forgotten.
Oct. Say, how was it?

Br. It was the feast of Saturn, —— and as it chanced
(Or rather, I should say, 'twas so arranged
To please him, at his own desire) he drew
The lot of king of the feast, and when the company
Were drunk he used his silly privilege
To have me be their fool.

Oct. Didst thou rebuke him?

Br. It happened thus. When all the guests in turn
Had answered to their forfeit, as his humour
Prescribed to each, he turned on me, and bade me
Show them a tragic scene, foreseeing how
The incongruence of time and place, the audience
Of drunken sots would turn my best to worst,
And smother passion in a sea of laughter.
But, for the wine I had been constrained to taste
Had mounted to my head, I felt at heart
A force to wither up their sottish jeers,
And ere I knew my purpose I was sitting
Upright upon the couch, and with full passion
Singing the old Greek song thou saidst so well
Suited our fortunes.

Oct. O, would I had been there!
They could not laugh at thee.

Br. They did not laugh.
The sadness and the sweetness of the music,

After their low hoarse songs, startled to sense
Their sodden, maudlin brains: they listened all
To the end, and then with daunted appetite
Sat in constraint and silence.

Oct. Oh! well done!
And what said Nero?

Br. He but smiled until
The tale tells how the poor child disinherited
Was put to death by his usurping brother;
Then his eye sank; and last, when Paris rose
At the end and praised my acting, he grew wild,
And said the feast was o'er, and bade us go.

Oct. Alas! 'twas done too well.

Br. I mind it not:
I wear no mask: and manifold occasion
Will oft surprise our closest guard, provoking
Unbidden motions that betray the heart:
'Twere vain to seek to quell them: they are like our shadows,
Which, if the sun shine forth, appear and show
Our form and figure. Such haps cannot be helped.

Enter Agrippina and attendants.

ATTENDANT.

The Augusta, your royal mother.

AGRIPPINA.

Good day, my son.

Br. Good morrow, mother.

Agr. Octavia still here! Child, why, know you not
'Tis long past noon, and Dionysius
Waits in the library? Begone, begone!
What! crying? Here's a picture to recover
A husband's favour!—Fulvia, attend my daughter
Into my tiring-room, and treat her eyes
To hide these scalded rings: and then, Octavia,
Go to the library, talk thy full hour;
Thy Greek is shameful. The rest go.

[*Exeunt Octavia and attendants.*

My son,
I'd speak with thee.

Br. My mother's pleasure?

Agr. Thou art my pleasure, child.
Fear me no more. I can be kinder to thee
Than ever I have been to my own true son.

Br. I thank your majesty.

Agr. Nay, now 'tis spoilt.
Best call me mother. Thou hast need of me.
I have heard all; what happed last night at supper.
Thou hast offended Cæsar.

Br. He does wrong
To use the freedom of the feast to insult me,

And then resent my freedom in repelling
His right-aimed insult.
Agr. True; the liberty
Should cover it: but in thy veins there runs
That which outcries thy speech; which, wert thou dumb,
Would speak thee guilty, and being tongued proclaims
Thy needful sentence. 'Twas done bitterly.
I know thy song. Dost thou believe, Britannicus,
That I could give the tale another ending?—
—Suppose, I say, I read it in some book
Writ differently: how that the proud usurper,
Owing all to his mother—dost thou follow me?—
How, when he came to power, instead of sharing
With her who had toiled for him, and in her love
Had parted from all praise, looking to reap
In him the fuller recompense of glory,
How he, when time came he should make return,
Denied her even the common duty owed
By son to mother, set her will aside,
Laughed at her, added to her shames, reproached her,
Mocked her with presents taken openly
Out of her treasures,—as to say outright,
All now is mine, thou hast no claim at all;
See what I choose to give, thank me for these—
Held her as nothing, hated her, brought in

His strumpet to her chamber,—that was the sum—
And she then, when she saw her love derided,
I say, repented, came to the boy she had wronged....
Br. I know, I know.
Agr. Then, if thou knowest, say;
What said he, when she told him she would turn
Her love on him, would set him in the place
Whence she had thrust him out? What said he?
Br. Nothing.
Agr. Nothing!
Br. Nay, I remember he said thus:
Wronged have I been by all, and none can right me;
All hath been false to me save sorrow only;
Justice and truth forsworn: There is no word
That I dare speak; yet if thou stoop to insult me
My tongue will show my wrongs are not forgotten.
Agr. My dearest boy, believe me.
Br. The last time
Thou call'dst me thus 'twas when my father died.
I thought then 'twas in kindness, afterwards
I found the meaning.
Agr. Yea, I confess I wronged thee;
That is my meaning now: had I not wronged thee,
My speech would have no sense at all: 'tis this
I come to urge: in this thou must believe me.
Canst thou not see, had I no pity in me,

No true remorseful pangs, yet still my wrongs
Would move me thus? Though thou trust not my love,
Read in these tears of anger and despair
The depth of my set purpose, my revenge.
Br. I partly do believe thee.
Agr. Believe me wholly,
And my revenge is thine.
Br. Nay, think not so.
There's blood in thy revenge; I'll none of it.
What are my private wrongs to Rome? If Cæsar
Stablish the empire, where's the citizen
Will take exception that he hath wronged his brother?
Since were I Cæsar I would vail my rights
To theirs, I still will act as I were Cæsar.
Agr. O could'st thou see this offer as thy last
And only safety thou would'st not refuse me.
Br. I rather hope to be forgiven the thing
I never thought, than win by doing it.
Agr. Thou wilt not join with me?
Br. There's nought to join,
Save to thy will to right me I might join
A hope of justice, to vain will vain hope.
Agr. Think for thy sister, boy. She cannot long
Be Cæsar's wife. Then, were her brother Cæsar,
She might be matched with any excellence.

Octavia's happiness lies on thy word.

Br. Octavia, dear Octavia—Now if thou'rt true
There is a way. This matter's full presentment
Hath not been strange to me, though I have barred the thought
And held no purpose in it; there's one way:
Those that have wronged can right. If thou would'st speak
With Burrus, he is plain and honourable,
And if he think there's gain in the exchange,
And his heart goes with it, he has the guards,—my name,
The sense of right, the promise of a largess,
Will win them to a man. The senate follows:
In a day, an hour, without a drop of blood
My wrongs are righted. Wilt thou speak with Burrus?

Agr. I dare not.

Br. Then do nothing. Or if thou canst,
Assure thy son that from my helpless state
And suffering spirit he has nought to fear.

Agr. Nay, thou wert right: and though 'tis difficult,
I'll speak with Burrus. 'Tis a most bold stroke,
But I can dare it. Good Burrus owes me much. [*Exit.*

Br. Strange, strange indeed. I have heard it said that murder
Falls on itself: that in the guilty breast

The implacable crime ploughs up with rooting tusk
The bleeding strings of nature: and in this woman
Of no remorse hath fated vengeance stirred
Her heart to hate her son. O, I did wrong
Yielding a little. Yet, since Burrus loves me,
That he should rule my fate is my best safety.
For her, if she's my foe, he may work on her.—
These days have brought much change and food for fear.

ACT · II

SCENE · 1

A room in Seneca's house. SENECA and BURRUS.

SENECA.

THE Armenian papers came through me last evening;
I sent them on at once.

BURRUS (refusing a seat).

Nay, thank ye, Seneca:
I have been two hours in the saddle.

Sen. 'Tis a matter
Of heavy import.

Bur. I demanded audience.

Sen. Well?

Bur. All is settled.

Sen. And who has the commission
To undertake the Parthian?

Bur. Corbulo.

Sen. 'Tis good. I like the choice. And what said Nero?

Bur. He told me well and wisely what to do,

When I had shown him all that must be done.
Sen. I wish his judgment were as tractable
With me. Took he your word?
Bur. The affair went pat.
What luck for Corbulo!
Sen. Pray sit, good Burrus,
And let us talk: my thought is most at ease
When I am sitting.
Bur. I pray you then be seated.
Sen. (*sitting*). Burrus, my difficulties day by day
Increase. The cares of empire are as nothing
To managing an emperor.
Bur. Why, what's the matter?
Sen. Give but attention to me.
Bur. I attend.
Sen. Do so most carefully: 'tis not a business
That may be brushed aside.
Bur. I am all attention.
Sen. Nero has broken with Britannicus:
Heard you of that?
Bur. Heard of it? I was there.
Sen. Well, that has brought to head the jealous difference
'Twixt Cæsar and his mother. Since he first,
At our advice, as was most fit, denied her
A place in power, she has striven to force a title

Out of her power for mischief: this you have seen:
But now to hear how she hath edged her practice;
She overskins her old accustomed hate
Of young Britannicus, speaks kindly of him,
Hints of his right; nay, even hath dared upbraid
Cæsar with usurpation. This was matched
With words from him, which she no sooner heard
Than in her rage disordered flew she hither
To win me to her part; when seeing that I
Stood firm, she fled in furious passion, saying
That I should learn what temper she was of.

Bur. I would that all the gods and goddesses
Might burn them up to cinders.

Sen. Peace, I say.
Cannot you sit? I need your best advice.

Bur. Except the lad.—Advice concerning what?

Sen. Why this new phase of court affairs. See you,
[*Takes a paper.*
'Twas my just counterpoise of warring forces
Ensured stability. Here Agrippina,
Saved from her own ambition in the splendour
Of her son's estate, serves in his interest
To guard Britannicus, whom else he had feared.
The boy, in favour of his sister's title,
Sinks his own right. Then Nero's youthful passions,
Growing to hatred of Octavia's bed,

Are stayed at equilibrium, as my judgment
And knowledge of the world enables me;
And all goes well, when an important factor,
The empress, rounds, and plays me false to her motive,
As here assumed, and vitiates with that flaw
The nice adjustment of each several item.—
I go to expound you this; you scarce attend,
Or answer with an oath.

Bur. A pious prayer
To extricate you from a world of trouble.

Sen. O, I can do it, Burrus, trust to me.
I place them all as chessmen, and I find
Delight in difficulty: but 'tis hard,
When one has chosen, strengthened a position,
To change the value of a piece. I think
Much of your judgment, and I ask you now
What you would do. I must decide to-day.

Bur. Why must?

Sen. As if you knew not.

Bur. If your art
Be to adapt yourself to every change . . . .

Sen. You know 'tis not. I say, should Nero now
Banish his mother?

Bur. Hark ye, Seneca,
If you remember, I foresaw this trouble.
I know no remedy, nor is't my office

To arrange the affairs of the palace, gods be praised.
But this is clear to me, that our three friends
Will never live together: what I urge
Is, separate them: if you cannot that,
We must not stick in balance when they break.
Whene'er that happens, our pre-eminent duty
Lies in our oath to Cæsar, and our second
May be his mother's pleasure, to whose schemes
We owe our place. [*Knocking heard.*

Sen. Who's there? come in.

Enter Servant.

SERVANT.

The Augusta
Has come in private, and desires an audience.

Sen. Again, you see, the Augusta.

Bur. Eh! I'll be off.

Sen. One moment, pray. (*To Servt.*) Beg her be pleased to enter. [*Exit Servt.*

Burrus, I adjure you not to go, your presence
May moderate her passion: or, if not,
'Twere best you saw it.

Bur. Well, all's one to me.

Enter Agrippina.

AGRIPPINA.

Be not surprised that I so soon return:

I have repented. Ha! the general here!
Thou seest me, Burrus, on a woman's errand.
Nay, no apology; thou hast o'erheard
My merit, not my fault.
Bur. I thank your majesty.
I will withdraw.
Agr. Nay, I desire thee stay.
I came not here to find thee; but thy presence
Mends my intention. Let us hold a council.
'Tis not the first time our triumvirate,
Secretly gathered in the nick of time,
Hath preordained the changes which should fall
Upon the earth like fate. To-day's decree,
If we combine, will be as big with action
As any we have uttered.
Bur. I fear I stand
In ignorance of the question.
Sen. I will explain.
Agr. Listen to me. We three who here are met
Stand in such place, that, if we but unite,
There's none can say us nay. I do not ask
Who raised thee, Burrus, or thee, Seneca,
To where ye are: nay, if I asked you that
I'd look for no more answer than if asking
What two and two make; 'tis self-evident,
Unquestioned; it was I; and if you owe

Allegiance to another, 'tis to one
Whom I made more than I made you; ay, one
Who has nothing but what was mine, and is mine:
His body mine, his life and being mine,
His power, his place, his honour mine, my son,
My Nero, who, when my husband late deceased,
The honest Claudius, passed to join the gods,
Was raised and set by me under your guidance,
To share with me the empire of the world.
Now what it may be that hath warped his heart
Is from the matter: enough that so it is.
I might blame one of you, sure not myself,
Who have ever held in love and kindness towards him
The same intention; nay, and from my kindness
I swerve not now, though for a wholesome end
I mask that kindness in severity.
There's but this choice, I must withdraw my favour,
Or suffer my disgrace: ay, and for you,
Burrus and Seneca, be sure, the same.
If I fall, ye will fall. Therefore being one
In interest with me, I look to find you ready
To stand by me in any scheme of action
Which may preserve our station, while we may.

Sen. Your majesty says well. We have hitherto
All held one purpose, and if now we are foiled
Or thwarted, none is thwarted more than I.

And since it is my pride, in the high place
Whereto your judgment called me, to exceed
The measure which might justify your choice,
I shall not fail. In these new difficulties
I would make no display of fresh resource;
Full means there will be, yet what means it is
I am not ripe to say.

Agr. What say'st thou, Burrus?
The matter Seneca avoids is this:
Shall I be driven to exile, or will ye
Join with me to forbid it?

Bur. Hath your majesty,
In urging opposition, any scheme
That might give life to policy?

Agr. Ay, something.
I would protect Britannicus: his claim
And popularity being pressed, must drive
Nero upon my side.

Bur. Such act were merely
The boy's destruction, were't not done in earnest
And backed by force.

Agr. Then, since the case demands
All earnestness, and since we lack not force . . . . .

Bur. Between your son's rule and your stepson's claim
There lies no middle way.

Agr. I never held
That a stout purpose chose a middle way.
Sen. What, what! Consider, madam, what you urge
Is to dethrone your son.
Agr. I am desperate.
Sen. Indeed, indeed!
Agr. What say'st thou, Burrus? Hast thou not a hope
The rightful heir might prove the better Cæsar?
Bur. Were this in earnest, yet my oath to Cæsar
Forbids me even to think the thing you say.
Agr. Thy oath to him! Rather to me 'twas sworn;
Who raised thee up to swear, and made the Cæsar
For thee to swear to? I can dispense your oaths:
Or rather, since they were unjustly sworn,
Justice dispenses them. 'Twould be a deed
Truer than oaths to break the oaths ye swore.
Bur. Justice is still against you. 'Twas unjust
To burn the will of Claudius; 'twas unjust
To hide Britannicus, and to bring forth
Your own son in his place: these things were wrongs,
And these old wrongs would you redub with new.
For when upon your wrongs Rome set her seal,
Her choice made right of wrong, and we that swore,
Swore not to Nero or Britannicus,
But unto Rome and to her chosen Cæsar.
Agr. Nay, Seneca, I think, will scarce say thus.

Sen. Burrus is right; and were he wrong, your scheme
But complicates the mischief.
Agr. Then ye desert me?
Sen. Nay, nay, in other ways I may do much.
I may win Nero back.
Agr. The thought is folly;
We fight against him.
Sen. Oh! 'tis open treason.
Agr. Eh! Why, I think my son's ingratitude
Is nought to this; he had the right to expect
My favours: but for you, whom I chose out
And set above the rest because I chose,
Made you my friends because I chose, for you
There is no excuse. Had ye no motive, yet
To see a woman in distress like mine,
Wronged by her son, and injured as no woman
Has ever been, should rouse a manly spirit,
Ay, make a coward burn to do me right.
But ye stand there aloof, and not a word.
O good Seneca,
Rememberest thou thy days in Corsica?
The stoic letters of thine exile, writ
With Naso's pang, and that exuberant page
To me, at the first tidings of recall.
I have it still, the letter, superscribed

Your most devoted slave. Was not that felt?
Had'st thou not cause? Now is the opportunity
Of my distress, now I stand to lose all,
All that those hard times strove for, all they won.
The faith thou owest me, still may make all mine;
Wilt thou deny it me?
Sen. Alas, good lady!
Agr. Alas!
Is this the vein? Think you I come to hear
Your lamentations? Ah! ye dare, I see,
Pity me while ye wrong me: but the truth
Ye dare not say. Ye dare not say, Lo, we,
Raised by your clemency, sworn to your service,
Seeing your fair wind is changed, and there's no hope
Left to your following, do as all knaves do,
Leave you to perish. Ah, all's lost, all's lost! [*Weeps.*
Bur. (*to Sen.*). Business attending me at home, I go. [*Going.*
Agr. Thou goest! Then go, thou wooden counterfeit.
Nay, I'll be with thee yet. (*Exit Bur.*) Pooh! let him go,
An ugly, one-armed, upstart, sneaking knave:
A title seeker, a subservient villain.
And thou,
Philosopher! come, teach me thy philosophy.

Tell me how I may be a dauntless Stoic
And a most pitiful ass. Show me thy method
Of magnanimity and self-denial,
Which makes of slaves the richest men in Rome.
Philosopher! Ay, thou that teachest youth
Dishonesty, and coinest honied speeches
To gloss iniquity, sand without lime.
Out, out upon thee!
Thou miserable, painful, hackney-themed
Botcher of tragedies, that deem'st thyself
A new Euripides, a second Cato:
A pedant rather, pander and murderer.
I'll let Rome know how pumpkin Claudius died;
I'll not be ashamed to say, 'twas I that spiced
His fatal mushroom. Honest Seneca
Stood by and smiled. True, true! I'll be true yet;
I'll right Britannicus. I'll tell the soldiers
What they should look for. Hear'st thou not their shouts?
Seneca to the Tiber! the philosopher,
The murderer to the Tiber! Fulvia, Fulvia!—
Fulvia, I go. Come, I will leave; lead on. [*Exit.*

Sen. And I to train the cub of such a dam!
[*Exit.*

SCENE · 2

Room in Domitia's house. Enter DOMITIA and SELEUCUS.

DOMITIA.

'Tis a most shrewd surmise, but nothing more;
I cannot listen to it. Though I hate
My sister, and would take some risk to crush her,
Yet must I set my foot on surer ground.
My better engine is Poppæa's dream,
Of which thou'st told me: I can build on that.
Thou should'st be there, I think, to-night.

SELEUCUS.

Ay, madam.
I go at once.

Dom. Speak nothing waveringly.

Sel. Nay, madam.

Dom. 'Tis her fate to marry Cæsar.

Sel. My art needs no instruction.

Dom. It must be so.

Sel. It is so, madam.

Dom. See, thy prophecy
Is that which should determine it. Go now. [*To door.*
Her purse will satisfy thee well.

Sel. Yet once
Ere I be gone, madam, I'll make a stand
To win thy credit.
Dom. Thou must show me cause.
Thou say'st the Augusta plots against her son,
Supports Britannicus, tampers with Burrus.
How know'st thou this?
Sel. Why should I lie?
Dom. I think
There may be some who make it worth thy while.
Sel. I would not meddle in this thing for money.
Dom. Why tell me then at all?
Sel. To win thy help.
Dom. To what?
Sel. To save the prince.
Dom. If thou'rt in earnest,
Where is thy confidence? Assure me first,
At least, of what thou say'st. Whence know'st thou this?
Sel. Fulvia, thy sister's maid, rewards my love
With many trifles: what she overhears
I piece together.
Dom. What of this was heard,
And how much pieced?
Sel. The Augusta sent all out,
And spake long time in private with the prince.

What passed I guess from this; that ere she left,
Being risen to go, as Fulvia at the door
Stood just without, she heard her voice most plainly
Angrily entreating, saying, that though he doubted,
Yet she would still with him regain her power:
If he held off yet he so far was right,
As that 'twas best to speak with Burrus first.

Dom. And has she since seen Burrus?

Sel. I think she hath.
He lately came from Seneca's, and there
The Augusta must have met with him.

Dom. What passed?

Sel. I know not yet. Fulvia will know and tell me.

Dom. But can'st thou trust her?

Sel. Ay, she hath no purpose.
Whate'er she hears is mine.

Dom. Then make this thine.
Her tampering with Britannicus is nought:
But if she speak with Burrus, there is matter
That I can work on. Ay, if that should be—
Make sure of that, and bring me word at once.
To-night thou hast thy business; go and do it.
Poppæa marries Cæsar.

Sel. Madam, I go. [*Exit.*

Dom. Now, my good sister, if this tale is true,
Thy fortune turns: I trample on thee now.

Ay, if she have spoke with Burrus, then one word
To Nero, and she is doomed. Patience and time
Bring us all opportunities: we need
But watch and wait. The way I least expected
She runs within the reach of my revenge. [*Exit.*

SCENE · 3

Room in Otho's house. Enter POPPÆA.

POPPÆA.

My dream was strange: but why of all strange dreams
Stands forth this dream, to say it hath a meaning?
There lies the mystery: the dream were nothing.
'Tis such a dream as I have prayed to dream.
'Tis such a dream as an astrologer
Must love to interpret. Nay, there's but one way
Seleucus can explain it.

Enter Seleucus.

I looked for thee
An hour ago: thou'rt late.

SELEUCUS.

The seasons, lady,
Of divination are determinate
By stars and special omens: 'tis our skill

To observe their presage. The hour is favourable.
Thy dream . . .

Pop. Is't good?

Sel. Beyond thy hope.

Pop. Then tell it.

Sel. Two thousand sesterces . . . .

Pop. I have it here.
See! I was ready for thee. [*Gives him a purse.*

Sel. I thank thee, lady.

Pop. Now for thy message.

Sel. I have sought out thy dream
By every means our art . . . .

Pop. Mind not the means.

Sel. There is one interpretation clear throughout. . . .

Pop. And that? 730

Sel. Thou shalt be wife unto two Cæsars.

Pop. Two! Now be Isis praised. Two! O, Seleucus,
Thou'rt an astrologer. Two! this is life,
Seleucus; this is life as well as fortune.
What are the names?

Sel. There ends my message, lady.

Pop. 'Tis good so far, but stays unkindly. Search,
I must know more. Above all things, the affair
Is secret. (*Knocking heard.*) I will send my servant to thee.

Thou must be gone: our business will not suffer
My husband stumbling on thee here. This way.
[*Exit Seleucus, being put out.*
My dream was true: my hopes and schemes inspired
Of heaven; yet this is far beyond them all.
Wife to two Cæsars; maybe, mother of Cæsars.
[*Noise at door.*
To sit upon their rare, successive thrones,
A manifold Augusta! Here's my husband.
What would he say? Two Cæsars, ay, two Cæsars!
[*Laughing heard without.*

Enter Otho.

OTHO.

Good evening, love.

Pop. Who laughed with thee without?

Oth. Lucan. He walked with me from Cæsar's supper.

Pop. Was Cæsar riotous?

Oth. Beyond all bounds.

Pop. See what you husbands are. You go abroad
For pleasure, and when met among yourselves
Push all to excess, and never think how patiently
Your wives must mope at home, and wait your coming.
And when you do return, up to the door
You bring your merriment; but at the door

'Tis left, and in you come, in solemn glumness,
To vent the sour reaction of your revels
Upon your housekeeper.

Oth. Enough, Poppæa;
I would be cheered.

Pop. Then I will cheer thee, love.
But what's the matter?

Oth. Listen. Thou hast reproached me
With going forth alone. What else could be?
Would'st thou consent to sit there at my side,
Where I, a man, am oft ashamed to sit?
Would'st thou, could'st thou be one among the women
Of Cæsar's fancy?

Pop. I spake not seriously.

Oth. See, but I do. I tell thee, love, this night
Thou wert invited.

Pop. I!

Oth. He would have pressed it.

Pop. Who would have pressed it?

Oth. Cæsar.

Pop. What dost thou say?
(*Aside.*) He treads on prophecy.

Oth. Knowing thy mind,
And mine, I begged him for our friendship's sake
Urge me no further.

Pop. Thou did'st well, and he?

Oth. Again to-night he asked for thee. 'Twas this
Which made me sad and thoughtful.
Pop. Why be sad?
Oth. The meaning, love, the meaning: thou must guess it.
Pop. The very reason, Otho, which thou urgest
Against my going, is in truth the reason
Why such as I should go. As Cæsar's friend,
Thou would'st do well to save him from the slough
He daily sinks in.
Oth. Nay, but such a stake
For such a flimsy hope.
Pop. I see a hope
In the invitation. Otho, let us see
What may be done among his friends.
Oth. Poppæa,
'Tis generously thought, but 'tis a thing
Must not be thought. Trust to my judgment, love.
'Tis Cæsar's love of power that threats us here;
He would have nought held from him. Thee I hold,
And most because I know thou would'st be mine.
Pop. Then thou must trust me, Otho.
Oth. And so I do.
Pop. Why, I were well his match. Let us go in.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE · 4

Room in the Palace. Enter AGRIPPINA and PALLAS.

AGRIPPINA.

Pallas, thy date is out: thou art dismissed;
Thou goest from the court: yet what thou takest
May soften thy regrets. Thy shiny days
Were not misspent, and thou may'st live like Cæsar.
Farewell, we still are friends: the debt I owe
I shall remember: 'twas thy power that first
Gave root to mine: for thee, I think my favours
Were once thy pleasure. If those days are gone,
We can look time in the face; we have not wasted
The days that flew: 'tis now with what remain
Still to be careful. Friends and firm allies.

Pal. Ay, firm as ever.

Agr. Nay, though thou goest first,
That is not much: even that I cannot save thee
Is sign that I am fallen ere thou could'st fall:
A deeper, deadlier fall, unless indeed
My wit can save me still.

Pal. Alas, dear queen,
Fear makes this parting sad. But if there's hope,

'Tis this, to gain thy son.

Agr. Ay, till our schemes be ripe;
And even though Seneca betray me,—and that
Is sure,—I fear not him. I know my son
Better than he, and I shall win him yet.
My plan is now to seem resigned to all:
I will pretend my purpose is to leave him,
And fly from Rome to voluntary exile.
'Twill work upon his fear and duty both,
To cut himself quite off from me, and all
That goes with me. He will entreat me stay;
And if I stay—

Pal. Ay, if this storm go by,
The turns of time may offer us reprisals.
At present use all means to gain thy son.

Agr. I shall. Farewell.

Pal. Be bold. The gods protect you.
Farewell.

Agr. Farewell. [*Exeunt severally.*

Enter Tigellinus and Paris.

TIGELLINUS.

Look from the window: thou wilt see 'tis true;
He takes all with him.

PARIS.

Nay, if this is all.

Tig. This much were all: and yet this caravan
Is but the least of six; His monstrous Grace
Brings up the rear.

Par. 'Tis nobly done of Cæsar.

Tig. 'Tis noble, say you, that the thief go quit
With all his plunder from the house he plundered?

Par. Hark how the weasel can upbraid the fox!
Good Tigellinus, there's no need to grudge
Pallas his scrapings; the sea is full of fish:
Rather thou should'st rejoice because thou seest
Thy probable hap. Pray that as many mules,
Litters and bags and bales, women and slaves
May comfort thee.

Enter Nero with Domitia.

NERO.

Paris, what do you here?

Par. I comfort Tigellinus on the fate
Of his predecessor.

Ner. (*at window*). Gods! see what a train
Drags out the very bowels of the palace.
No wonder my good mother's man resigns
With resignation.

Tig. Ha! ha!

Ner. I seek the Augusta.
She late was here; go find her; say I wait her.

[*Exeunt Tigellinus and Paris.*

DOMITIA.

Through my discovery, Nero, thy good fortune
Lifts thee a corner of the veil whereunder
Thy mother plots. Be not thou now deceived
To further trust. She is bent upon thy ruin.

Ner. Though it be true she urged Britannicus
Even in those words, we lack the surety yet
She spoke them in good faith.

Dom. O, there's no doubt.

Ner. My mother is very deep, and often looks
Far from her meaning. She will use this way
To worm a confidence.

Dom. She did not then.

Ner. Yet must the boy have thought so, for you said
That what she urged he took not all in kindness.

Dom. He bade her speak with Burrus.

Ner. The villainous brat!

Dom. Drive not the fault on him. Did Burrus waver,
Nothing could save thee. And it seems thy mother
Had hope to win him. She comes; now be thou firm.
I will be gone. [*Exit.*

Ner. (*solus*). Now she cannot deceive me.

Enter Agrippina.

Agr. My son, thy mother comes at thy command.

Ner. O excellent mother!
Agr. What would'st thou with me, son?
I come to hear, and yet I scarce am fit
For banter or abuse. I am ill to-day.
Ner. No wonder; 'tis you do too much. 'Twere better
You spared yourself. Go rest; my business
Will not cure headaches.
Agr. Speak whate'er it be.
Ner. Nay, if you're ill—
Agr. My sickness will not pass.
To-morrow I shall leave thee; that last grief
Will soon engulph the rest: speak while thou may'st.
Ner. What's this! leave me to-morrow?
Agr. I would spare thee
That worst disgrace of sending me away.
I go of myself.
Ner. What now?
Agr. 'Tis well resolved.
I have been foolish; 'twas a mother's fault,
A tender fault: forget it, and hereafter
Know my love better. If my presence bred
Dislike, thy kinder mind may yet return
When I am gone.
Ner. Why, what has happed, I pray?
Agr. Nothing. I have only come to see my error.

I thought, 'twas I that gave him all . . . . . .
Ner. Tut! tut!
'Tis the old story told a thousand times.
Agr. Ay, and forgot as oft. Thy constant wrongs,
I think, have dug my grave. Dost thou remember
What answer once I made the sorcerer
Who prophesied thy fortune? Thy son, he said,
Shall reign, and kill his mother. Let him kill me,
So that he reign, I cried. He spake the truth,
But 'tis by grief thou slay'st me.
Ner. That old rubbish
Were best forgotten.
Agr. Indeed, I had forgot it:
But yesternight I dreamed it all again;
A frightful dream: plain as I see thee now
Stood'st thou before me thus, with angry words
[*She acts.*
Mocking, until I wept for shame; but thou
Did'st only laugh the more. Then ran I to thee,
And bared my breast, and cried, Kill me, O son!
And thou fastened'st thy snaky eyes upon me,
So that I could not see what thy hand did.
But, oh! I knew. I heard thy weapon grate
Leaving the scabbard, and a fiery pang
Pierced through my heart. Ah!
Ner. (*aside*). Heavens, is she mad?—

Mother, good mother, mother!

Agr. 'Twas nothing. Nay, where am I? I was come
To hear thy speech. What is't thou hast to say?

Ner. (*aside*). If this were trickery? Let the fact try.—
'Twas this: what speech you held the other morning
With young Britannicus.

Agr. (*aside*). Ah! knows he that?—
Thy spies are most alert. This time, at least,
I praise their zeal: though thou art slow to thank me
For my kind service done to thee and him.

Ner. Whether is it kinder, say you, to him to urge him
To embrace the desperate plot, of which already
He stood suspected, or more kind to me
To water this rebellion with the tears
Of your insidious passion?

Agr. Your man's a fool: I heard
Your quarrel, and took pains to sound the boy.

Ner. Next you saw Burrus.

Agr. Well, and what said he?

Ner. Nay, that's for you to tell.

Agr. 'Twas this: Britannicus
Most truly said that nought could help his claim,
Except the guards and Burrus: at which word
I flew to Burrus, offered him the bait;

And when he showed the scruple of his oath,
Three words from me confirmed him.
Ner. If this were true!
Agr. How much you need me, Nero, will be plain
When I am gone. Who has deceived you now?
Who works this madness in you, to conceive
That your disaster could be gain to me?
Have you believed what angry words I spoke
Were born of purpose, that my threats against you
Were aught but passion? You count not the tears,
The bitter, secret tears, for every pang
Your wrongs have wrought in me; and bitterer far,
The sharp remorse for each retaliation
Of speech provoked in anger. Let it end;
'Tis best I go.
Ner. See! if you had gone before
We had never quarrelled; now there's nought to lose
By going, 'tis a quarrel that you go.
Agr. No quarrel, nay. 'Tis only this: I thought
That in your love I held perpetual office.
'Tis not so. Now my time is out: I go
As Pallas goes.
Ner. The sleek, extortionate Pallas,
Dost thou defend the despicable Pallas?
Agr. I would be kind to friends; none will stand
by you,

If you cast off those to whom most you owe.
'Twas first through him I came to seize the power
That made you Cæsar. Look! you have lost a friend.
Be wiser when I am gone.

Ner. I have good friends,
Burrus and Seneca: I trust them both.

Agr. Cannot you read the cause why still they urge you
To cast me off?

Ner. 'Tis the disgrace they feel
To see the empire managed by a woman.

Agr. 'Tis the constraint they feel in all their actions
Being overruled by me. Do you not see
They are my ministers, and you are ruled
By them in all they counsel? Rid of me,
They rule the world. Think you, when they have cast
What was above them underneath their feet,
They will have care to exalt what was below?

Ner. They both are honest men; you chose them well.

Agr. You are too trustful, Nero. As you love
Your life, I say, be jealous of these men;
These men that now would rule thee but to take
The empire from thy hands. They may speak ill
Of me,—believe that if thou list,—but oh!
If once they seem to encroach, delay not then;

Hear no excuse nor explanation; strike,
Kill them, I say, before they murder thee.
Ner. But, mother, Seneca loves me.
Agr. As a master
Will love a pupil while he takes instruction.
He'll love you while you let him reign. Alas!
I scarce dare leave you to him. You are too kind;
Will shrink to use the sword as it is needful
For one who rules to wield.
Ner. You cannot think
These men would serve me so.
Agr. What is my purpose?
My life's one object, my supreme ambition?
Was't not to raise thee where thou art, and now
Is't not to keep thee there?
Ner. So once I thought.
Agr. O think it yet. Look! there is none can love you,
Nero, as I must love you; there's not one
Can guard you as I can. Have I not proved
My power? While I am by you, it is yours.
Ner. Stay then.
Agr. O that it might be!
Ner. Thou shalt not go.
Resign thy outward power; be in all else
As heretofore. Forget what I suspected.

Be still my mother.

Agr. Alas!

Ner. Yea, I will have it.

Agr. It cannot be.

Ner. Why not?

Agr. Seneca, my son,
Will not permit it.

Ner. Who is Seneca
To say me nay?

Agr. Unless you join with me
He will o'errule you.

Ner. He shall not o'errule me.

Agr. For that I'd stay. I would give up all else
To stand by you: ay, and be happy so.

Ner. And so it shall be. Have thy private fortune,
Remain in Rome.

Agr. But can you trust me, Nero? 990

Ner. Nay, I will never more suspect thee. Kiss me.

Agr. O, now you are good and kind. Tell me, who was it
Did me this wrong?

Ner. It was Domitia told me.
She spied on thee.

Agr. My sister! ha! you know not
The grudge between us?

Ner. Yes, I know of that.

Agr. And not suspect her slander? Did she also
Commit Britannicus?

Ner. She cast all blame
On thee.

Agr. I feared she might have wronged the boy.

Ner. Is he, then, innocent?

Agr. I went so far
In sounding him as even to risk my credit.
Let not unjust suspicion add a weight
To the just blame we bear. You must protect him.
Promise me that.

Ner. I will ask Seneca.

Agr. Forgive, at least, his foolish indiscretion.
He begged me make his peace. Now have I made it?

Ner. I'll think no more of that.

Agr. My dearest son,
The joy of a good action will be yours
As well as mine. O, I am happy now—
Indeed, most happy now.

Ner. Come then, dear mother.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT. III

SCENE · 1

The same. SENECA.

SENECA.

BURRUS was right. The more I think of it,
The time has come that one or both must go;
So the more dangerous first, then are we quit
At once of all our mischief and disgrace.
'Tis past belief that she who plunged in crime
To enthrone her son should now plot to dethrone him.
There is no bridle for a wicked woman.
Men may despise the venerable path
Of virtue, and refuse the wholesome laws
Of plain philosophy, but still they lean
Towards reason, even in their wickedness.
There's an accountable consistency
Found in their actions; but if once a woman
Throw off, as men soon do, the first restraints
Of credulous childhood; if her nature lack
Tenderness, modesty, and that respect

To self which sees in self a thing to guard
From passion and caprice, and in the pleasure
Of fitness finds a law,—if she lack that
Or overpass it,—there's no further bound:
All things are mixed together; virtue, crime,
Wisdom and folly. For they have a spirit
Of infinite wrong genius. Rule, I say,
Such women if you can; rule them with iron.

Enter Nero.

NERO.

Good-morrow, Seneca. Thou comest in time;
I need thy counsel.

Sen. I am here to give it.

Ner. Then tell me: Where I have been lately threatened,
Am I in danger? I will use thy judgment.
Is't needful for my safety to remove
Britannicus?

Sen. I have well considered all.
You must dismiss your mother.

Ner. Not so, Seneca.
She now resigns all power and sign of empire,
And is content to live in quiet, retired
With few attendants and contracted state.

Sen. She offered terms?

Ner. See, since she now concedes
All reasonable claims, my duty towards her
Patches our quarrel.
Sen. Whence this newborn trust?
Ner. She must remain. What of Britannicus?
Sen. He need not trouble you.
Ner. So said my mother.
I had thought differently, and even had made
Full preparation for his going hence.
Would'st thou too bid me think there is no danger?
Sen. None, if your mother goes.
Ner. But nay, she stays.
Sen. That makes him dangerous.
Ner. Thy reason, Seneca?
Sen. I well can guess, Nero, your mother's vein
With you in private: but 'twould much divert
Your inclination from it, could you know
Her latest way with me.
Ner. What hath she said?
Sen. Will you now think she hath urged Burrus and me
To set our honoured oaths and firm allegiance
To you aside, as being unjustly sworn;
To undo all she has done, and bring Britannicus
Back to the people as Rome's rightful heir?
Ner. I knew this, Seneca; and if 'twere meant,

Where lies the danger?

Sen. True; but then she vows
Plainly that, rather than resign her power,
She will make known her crimes, nor spare herself,
If in the implication of her ruin
She may involve us too. Know you of that?

Ner. She could not mean it.

Sen. Certainly 'twas in passion
Spoken, and fury: but 'tis such a thing
As might be done in passion.

Ner. And what says Burrus?

Sen. He too would urge, as I, the Augusta's exile.

Ner. Yet must she stay.

Sen. Nay, Nero, she must go.

Ner. I bade thee, Seneca, to counsel me:
Call'st thou this counsel? 'Tis in the exigence
Of such affairs that their necessity
Precludes the true decision: this thou'st taught me:
And that the man of counsel is but he
Who handles best the circumstance, most gently
Resolves the knot, not cuts it. In this difficulty
Is there no course?

Sen. I go not back from this;
If both remain there's none.

Ner. Is my life threatened?

Sen. Ay.

Ner. Then Britannicus must go, and shall go,
As first I purposed.
Sen. Whither will you send him?
Ner. Far out of hearing of his claim. 'Tis not
A trifling matter.
Sen. See now to the other extreme
How you o'erleap the mean from wrong to wrong!
Ner. Such wrongs the title of my power condones.
Shall I at the outset of a world-wide policy
Stick at a household scruple, and for fear
To do a private wrong forfeit the power
Which makes me Cæsar? See my glory trip
At a little ill because I will not level
My safety with the welfare of the world?
Sen. But what you must not, that you cannot do.
Ner. Rather what Cæsar must do, that he may.
Rome understands not empire yet: we learned
Something of Herod.
Sen. O the injustice, Nero!
The wrong! How! Will you sooner spill a life
So innocent, your creditor in kindness,
Than do disgrace to another, one so guilty
As to deserve, sinking all exigency,
The fearful penalty you now misplace?
Think twice.
Ner. Why, if I think of it again,

Is not thy error fourfold more than mine?
This need is granted to all tyrannies,
To slay pretenders, ay, and most of all
Those of the family: but for a mother,
The very Persian or the unrivalled Jew
Would shrink from her dishonour.
Sen. (*aside*). What to say?
Being out of kinship 'twere the lesser blot—
Yet there's his innocence. Necessity
Cannot suborn morality so far
As such confusion,—nor the alternative
May yet be shunned,—and when the best is wrong . . .
Ner. What thinkest thou?
Sen. Wait: it shall be my office
To find some better means.
Ner. 'Twill be thine office
To show in such a speech as I may make
After his death, that, howsoe'er he died,—
Which you shall know no more than shall my hearers,—
'Twas for the general good.
Sen. Be counselled, Nero.
This is not my advice.
Ner. Thou offerest none
Which can be taken.
Sen. See, I have brought your speech
Touching the Parthian war.

Ner. 'Tis long.

Sen. The matter
Being very weighty, 'twill be looked for from you
To say thus much: but if it seem too long,
'Tis so composed that with these brackets here,
Skipped as you list, the speech is any length.

Ner. I thank thee. I shall need that other speech.

Sen. I pray you may not need it. My advice
Is wait.

Ner. Is it? Stay—Seneca, dost thou think
My mother was in earnest when she urged
Treason on thee and Burrus? And dost thou think
She fooled me in saying that she made proposal
To Burrus but to sound his honesty?

Sen. Eh! with that tale she took you?

Ner. Is't not true?

Sen. That true!

Ner. She was in earnest though in passion?
Answer me.

Sen. Ay, she was.

Ner. I pray thee leave me.
I shall not wait. [*Exit Seneca.*
I stand alone. Such officers as share
The functions of tyrannic government
Cannot be looked to for a policy
Of personal security; they lack

The motive that abates the fear of crime.
Britannicus must go, and 'tis my hand
Must aim his death. I have a medicine
Which he must drink for me, to save my life.
To-night shall do it. But for my other enemy,
My mother, who with such dissimulation
Won me, spite of foreknowledge of her deeds,
And judgment of her purpose—Ha! indeed;
Seneca's laughing-stock! Now, what I do
Will much surprise her. If it kill her hope
And prove my temper towards her, 'twill be well.

[*Exit.*

SCENE · 2

Room in Domitia's house. Enter DOMITIA and PARIS.

DOMITIA.

Come hither, Paris!
Thou art my freedman.

PARIS.

Ay, madam.

Dom. Hitherto
Thou hast served me well.

Par. Ay, madam.
Dom. Would'st thou now
Retrieve thy purchase money?
Par. Dost thou say
Thou wilt restore me that for any service
I can perform?
Dom. I do.
Par. But name the deed.
Dom. Dost thou remember Crispus Passienus?
Par. Could I forget thy honoured husband, madam,
That was my master?
Dom. Paris, thou hast a wife,
And thy wife hath a sister . .
Par. Ay.
Dom. How think'st thou
Thy wife would love her sister, if that sister
Supplanted her with thee, sowed seeds of hate,
Contrived divorce, and when thou wert divorced
Should marry thee herself?
Par. Madam, I know
Thy wrong, and share thy hate.
Dom. That was not all.
Par. Not all?
Dom. Nay, listen, Paris: if I forget
My kinship in my hatred, I have cause.
I loved him, and have now no thought in life

But to avenge his murder.

Par. Why! can'st thou think? . . .

Dom. Think! do I think? I cannot speak of it.
If 'tis suspicion, be it so—and yet . . .
Well, thou hast seen my heart—even were my sister
Kind I should not forgive: but seeing she works
Against me still to drive me from the court,
I put my strength with Cæsar, to disbarrass
The palace of this plague. Say wilt thou aid me? 1180

Par. The favour Cæsar shows me binds me, lady,
To have no thought but his; and if his mother
Misses his love, 'tis not made up by mine.

Dom. I'd have thee on my side whate'er I do.
I have now contrived a scheme which hangs on thee
To bring it home.

Par. I will do anything
That will not touch my life.

Dom. She is hard to catch.
Late, when she plotted with Britannicus,
Though 'twas as clear as day, when brought to question
She quite out-faced us all.

Enter Servant.

SERVANT.

Madam, Seleucus 1190
The astrologer would speak with you.

Dom. Admit him. [*Exit Servt.*

Paris, I'll tell thee later of my plans.
Meanwhile keep close with Nero: let me hear
Aught he lets fall that might advance our matter:
Seleucus' visit is a part of it;
I'll speak with him alone.

Par. Madam, I go. [*Exit.*

Enter Seleucus.

Dom. How now, Seleucus? Foiled!

SELEUCUS.

I warned you, lady,
How impotent and vain an arm hath truth
Unhelped by art.

Dom. Thou did'st but well, and now
I shall lean more on thee. Hast thou persuaded
Poppæa of her fortune?

Sel. Ay, my lady,
I promised her two Cæsars.

Dom. Two! how two?

Sel. A secret that of art; our divination
Hath many such. The gods are favourable.

Dom. Talk not to me of gods. One was enough;
Yet the other matters not. Two Cæsars indeed!
Most favourable gods!—See, here I give you
Two hundred sesterces: but for that sum

Require another service.

Sel. I thank you, madam.

Dom. Locusta hath been seen with Nero.

Sel. Ah,

How knew you that?

Dom. Attend to what I say.

I fear 'tis for Britannicus: the Empress,
Ridding herself, cannot have quitted him.
If 'tis his death is aimed at—and 'tis for thee
To probe and reach the truth—then if 'tis possible
Thou must prevent it. Go, give him a message,
He must not sup with Cæsar if he is bid.
Find you the probabilities, and lay
The warning where is need.

Sel. 'Twere a good office, lady.

Dom. Go quickly then. If thou do well in this,
I will reward thee well.

Sel. I will deserve it. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE · 3

The room in Otho's house. Enter POPPÆA and MAID.

MAID.

Madam, the litter waits.

POPPÆA.

Give me my mirror, miss.
Why, see how slovenly thou'st done my hair;
'Tis out already.
Maid. With your pardon, madam,
'Tis very well. Nay, 'tis as firm as a rock.
You look your best to-night.
Pop. Where is the flower
I gave thee?
Maid. Here, my lady.
Pop. Put it in.
There, there. Ay, that will do. Now where's my cloak? [*Exit Maid.*

Enter Otho.

OTHO.

So then you are going?
Pop. Yes, I go alone,
Since you will not come with me.

Oth. You are always free
To have your way; but when your wish is mine,
It is twice yours. This time you know 'tis not:
And were I used to set constraint upon you,
Could it be said Otho e'er crossed his wife
With a command, it should be now: I'd say
This I forbid.

Pop. And why?

Oth. I entreat you, dearest.

Pop. I am pledged to go.

Oth. Go not.

Pop. There's now no choice.

Oth. A light excuse would serve: a sudden sickness,
A cold, a headache. Do not go.

Pop. Why, look! 1240
If you are not jealous, Otho! jealous, jealous.
You see not straight.

Oth. I see you smile on Cæsar.

Pop. And think you, then, I must have turned my love
Where I have smiled? that I would play you false
For the pleasure of it?

Oth. Why then sup with Cæsar?

Pop. A trifle hangs upon him I would wear,—
The world.

Oth. So dazzled by the imperial splendour!

Think: to be Cæsar's mistress for a year
Is not to rule the world.
Pop. I will be Cæsar's wife.
Oth. Ah! look you then so high?
Pop. Who shall be called my rival?
Oth. Cæsar's wife.
Pop. She hinders not.
Oth. Oh, thou would'st never dare it,
Did'st thou not love him.
Pop. What should I not dare?
Oth. Hast thou considered well the ambiguous style
Thou goest to take, and yet determined?
Pop. Ay.
Oth. 'Tis death, 'tis death. I speak now but for thee:
Not for myself. The cup Octavia drinks
To quit thy place thou too wilt come to taste.
Pop. That is my risk. The sport were tame without it:
The game can boast a sting.
Oth. Weigh well the danger:
Think of it thus; to live on a caprice
Whose jealousy is death; where for the reason
One seems to love thee will be ten to hate thee;
Where not to be beforehand with a treachery
Is to be victim.
Pop. I can steer my way.

Oth. And for this desperate venture wilt cast off
My love, our love?
Pop. What is love?
Oth. Art thou Poppæa?
Wer't any else butthou that questioned thus,
My answer then were ready: I should say
Ask of Poppæa, 'tis the thing she knows;
Ask Otho's wife what love is, she can tell.
And thou to ask! as if 'twere some strange matter
Wide of experience, and to ask of me
Who won thee for my teacher!
Pop. 'Tis true the impeachment
I make of love is that he hath exhausted
His treasure rather than denied us aught.
Oth. Exhausted love! how mean you?
Pop. See! I am made
Of other stuff and passions besides love.
You cannot wish that all my life should move
Pent in this narrow circle, day by day
Keeping the pretty game up which I learned
When I was green: that I should ne'er do else
Than this one thing, and that so constantly
That even the habit and the practice of it
Are scarce employment; that I should grow grey,
And see the wide and seasonable field
Of life's exertion and excitement fallow

With this one weed of love?

Oth. A weed, you say!

Pop. I have other motions in me. I've an itch
Men call ambition, and I see a prize
Looks worth the having.

Oth. 'Tis not worth the having.

Pop. Why, what were I to thee, could'st thou be Cæsar?

Oth. Even all thou art; I have no itch to rule
Merely to see that game played out, and cry
At the end—what is ambition?

Pop. It hath no end.

Oth. 'Tis plain love hath an end.

Pop. Nay, as I love thee,
I still shall love thee. Only, Otho . . . .

Oth. What?

Pop. I thought your eye was open to perceive
The grandeur of my scheme.

Oth. Thou wert mistaken.

Pop. Upon what falls to-night, let us decide.
I have no secrets from you: if I prosper,
Desert me if you will, but blame me not:
For dared I combat Cæsar's inclination
There were as much to lose. The thing I do
Will be your safety.

Oth. Rather would I die,

Ay, rather far that thou should'st die than do
This baseness willingly.
Pop. Nay, speak not so.
I shall do nothing base.
Oth. Thou must succeed.
Only before thou goest I'll kiss thee once. [*Kisses Pop.*
Otho's last kiss. Farewell.
Pop. Good night. I go.
Lesbia, my cloak! I shall have news ere morn. [*Exit.*
Oth. Gone! With a grace
As firm, as pleasant, gay and self-possessed
As that with which she hath come a thousand times
To meet me, kiss me, and call me hers, she goes
To change her husband . . gone! and not a sign
To show that leaving me was losing aught!
Fool that I was! To the soul I knew her vain,
Self-seeking, light, petulant at the breath
Of contradiction, and yet I trusted. What,
Asks she, is love. Ay, what? I love my dog;
He is devoted beyond reason, pitiful
In his dependence; he will scarce reproach me
With some short wondering sorrow, if I strike him—
I love my horse; he bears me willingly,
Answering spiritedly; with all his strength
Generous and gentle. But woman, if man love her,—
Seeing she is less devoted than the hound,

Less noble than the horse,—'tis that we deem,
That being human she can gauge the worth
Of our intensity, and in kind somewhat
Repay it: 'tis a delusion; spite of shew,
She hath not in her heart that which her eyes
Fondly declare. There is no passion possible
Which beauty can interpret or soft speech
Express, which was not mine; ay, by that title
O'er and o'er; yet I think no dog in Rome
Would leave the meanest slave that fed him once,
As hath this woman left the man that loved her.

[*Knocking.*

Enter Lucan and Petronius.

LUCAN.

Ha! here he is. We have come to fetch you, Otho.

Oth. I do not go to-night.

PETRONIUS.

Not go! What is't, man?—ill?

Oth. My wife has gone, therefore I do not go:—
You see the matter, maybe have foreseen it;
I was too blind. Spare me your condolence;
I do not wish even sympathy. You know
I loved her, but 'tis over. Let me give you
Such knowledge as I wish my friends to have,
Else might they mistake somewhat. See! she is gone

To-night against my wish: 'tis nothing more:
But this will lead to much. I let my house;
Sell you my wine, Petronius, if you wish it,
And take—I shall not want for interest—
The Lusitanian proconsulate.

Luc. You go from Rome?

Oth. I do.

Petr. Break not with Cæsar.

Oth. I'll take employment.

Petr. Jove! I think you're wise,
Otho; you're wise. I've half a mind myself
To give my friends the slip. But as it is,
Well.. come, I'll take the wine; what is your price?

Oth. The price I gave.

Petr. A bargain. I shall send for it.

Luc. (*to Otho*). Otho, I will not go. Although thy wrong
Cannot be stayed, yet would I rather die
Than sit and smile on it.

Oth. I thank thee, Lucan.
I'd ask thee rather look upon the matter
As on a thing of course: I think it is.
Go, take no note of it.

Luc. If 'tis thy wish.

Oth. It is. Good night.

Luc. and Petr. Good night. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE · 4

A room in the Palace. Enter AGRIPPINA.

AGRIPPINA.

Thus must it be then. I must be cast out,
Turned from the palace, lodged in a private house,
Retired, reduced, forgotten, like any relic
Of barbarous royalty, caged out of reach
Of good or ill; my state just so much show
As has no meaning. Now may some god of mischief
Dare set me in the roll of puny spirits.
Ah!—Hath this my seal, seemeth it? O may my foes
Be fooled so far to think that guile will stay
First in catastrophe. Nay, if I crouch,
'Tis but to plant a foot whence I may bound
With braver spring.—I am clear; the right's my hope.
Right against blood hath still been honourable.
Men love the name of Brutus. The first Brutus
Slew his own son; the last his Cæsar. Ha!
'Tis madness; nay, that's not my thought, not that.
'Twould fright the world that there should be a woman
Who could slay Cæsar and son in one. Nay, nay,
That lies beyond all fate. Yet, short of that,—
O blood, thou sacrament and bond of nature,

Look to the strain: summon thy best allies,
Thy yearnings and thy shudderings, thy terrors
And dreams of dread; marshal the myriad fingers
Of scorn and hate: else, O thy rottenness
Will out. Indeed I think thou'rt a weak thing,
Bred of opinion; when I would have trusted thee,
Hath not that other rivet of thy chain
Snapped at the mutual end? Thy boasted anchor
Drags on the bottom, and my ship drifts on
To the rocks, to the rocks: missing that hold, the sense
Is dizzy with madness; ay, and whither I go
Is hidden; nor aught I know, save that the future,
Whate'er it be, I shall do much to make.

Enter Britannicus.

Ah! ah! 'tis thee.
Speak softly, for these walls have ears.

BRITANNICUS.

Thou thinkest
That Cæsar watches me.

Agr. To-day thy spies
Are mine, but must not hear.

Br. Hast thou seen Burrus?

Agr. He is thine enemy: no hope from him.

Br. I would not have this spoken of as my hope.

Agr. True, boy. I mentioned not thy name, and Nero,

Being now persuaded thou art innocent,
Forgives thee. Let the risk I ran for thee
Be earnest of more good.
Br. I thank thee for it.
Agr. 'Tis nothing, this. Thou yet shalt reign.
Br. I pray thee
Draw me not into thy deep-plotted schemes
That rush on guilt. If I have hope or wish,
'Tis but to live till the divorce be writ
'Twixt Cæsar and my sister: that is not long
To wait; and then her exile, which must follow,
If I may share, I think some days of peace
May be in store for both. That is my hope,
Not Rome, nor empire, but some tranquil spot
Where innocence may dwell, and be allowed
To be its own protection.
Agr. Are you that fool?
Br. I would none doubted it.
Agr. Can it be possible
That thou, who in thy veins hast the best blood
Of Rome, should'st own so beggarly a spirit,
And being the heir of all the world should'st wish
Only to hide thy claim, so thou may'st live
The life which broken-hearted slaves, and men
Diseased and aged scarce prize?
Br. I hear, I hear,

And am not shamed.

Agr. Nay, then I have more to say.

Br. I too might say somewhat. Is it not strange,
Thou being a lady, should'st possess a heart
So fond of wrong, and blood, and wrathful deeds?

Agr. Ah, ah! Thou thinkest that thou know'st me rightly,
And yet would'st dare to taunt me, and to thwart
My stablished purpose? Child, I say, remember
The deeds thou castest in my teeth, and think
Whether it were not much better now at last
To side with me, and take the help I proffer.
I have sworn to set thee on the throne; think twice
Ere thou oppose my will.

Br. Did'st thou not say
Thou had'st persuaded Nero of my innocence?

Agr. Say I was wrong.

Br. Nay, thou wert right in that,
Wrong now returning on disclaimed ambition.

Agr. Art thou content to see thyself deposed,
Thy sister thus dishonoured . . . .

Br. Say no more.

Agr. Consider!

Br. Nay, I'll not consider.

Agr. Now
This once again I bid thee, child, consider.

Doubt not my power.

Br. No more. I will not join thee.

Agr. Then hear me, child. Whether thou join or not,
Whether thou wilt be Cæsar, or refusest,
Thou shalt be Cæsar. If thou wilt not plot,
It shall be plotted for thee: in my hands
I hold thy life, and guard it but for this,
To make thee Cæsar. Ay, and if thou shrinkest
When the day comes, I'll have a doll made like thee;
My men shall carry it about, and style it
Britannicus, and shout to it as to Cæsar.
I say thou shalt be Cæsar, think it o'er.
Dare not refuse me: 'tis not yet too late;
To-morrow I will speak with thee again.
Now to thy better thought. [*Exit.*

Br. O murderess!
And for this last turn must I thank my folly,
That partly trusted her. Now would to heaven,
If live I must, that I might change my lot
With any man soe'er, though he be chosen
And picked for misery. Surely there's none
In all the empire can show cause to stand
And weigh his woe with mine. Find me the man,
If such there be, that hath an only sister
'Spoused to a murderer and adulterer,

Who hates her virtue, since it shames pretext
To cast her off: or, if such man be found,
Hath he for mother one that slew his father,
And threats him with like death? or if all this
Be matched in one, hath he no remedy?
Is his speech treason? Is his silence treason?
Is he quite friendless, helpless?
Forbidden to budge a foot from the dread focus
Of crime and anguish? 'Mongst his lesser wrongs
Hath he this brag, that he hath been robbed, as I,
Of the empire of the world? O happy hinds,
Who toil under clear skies, and for complaint
Discuss long hours, low wages, meagre food,
Hard beds and scanty covering: ye who trail
A pike in German swamps, or shield your heads
On Asian sands, I'd welcome all your griefs
So I might taste the common nameless joys
Which ye light-heartedly so lightly prize,
And know not what a text for happiness
Lies in a thoughtless laugh: what long, impassable,
Unmeasured gulfs of joy sunder it off
From my heart-stifling woe.

Enter Octavia.

Thou art welcome, sister.

OCTAVIA.

Brother, a request you must grant.

Br. Anything,
Dearest, to thee.

Oct. Sup not to-night with Cæsar.

Br. I must. Yet what's thy reason? Thou art moved
Strangely beyond the matter.

Oct. Read this paper.

Br. (*reads*). *Britannicus, sup not to-day with Cæsar.*
How came you by it?

Oct. 'Tis from Fulvia,
The maid that loves Seleucus; whence 'tis his.

Br. Most like; I know the turbaned mountebank
Keeps an old kindness for me. Yet nay, nay—
If this should now be found—nay, he's too shrewd
To put himself in writing.

Oct. He might dare
With Fulvia.

Br. Nay. I cannot think 'tis his.
And were it, what's his credit? I do not trust
These fellows far. They trade in mystery,
And love to thicken water,—and if there be
A plot to poison me, to-day's occasion
Offers no easier vantage than to-morrow's.
My safety lies elsewhere.

Oct. O do not go.

Br. Fear not, Octavia, I am very careful,
And eat but sparingly of any dish,
Nor aught but what goes round. To stay away
Might show suspicion, and could serve no end.

Oct. Brother, be warned, go not to-night; to-morrow
We may learn more. I beg . . .

Br. Nay, urge me not,
Since with this warning I am doubly safe.

Oct. Oh, I dread Nero's anger; 'tis most certain
That ill will come of it.

Br. Nay, fear him not.
Let us go sup. I will use all precaution,
Thou may'st be sure, since for thy sake I do it:
And while thou livest I shall have both reason
And wish to live. Have care, too, for thyself;
I think thy peril is no less than mine. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE · 5

Supper-room in the Palace. All are reclined at two tables, thus:

Agrippina, Nero, Poppæa.	*A gentm., Octavia, A lady.*
Tigellinus, A gentm.	*Britannicus, Paris.*
A lady, Domitia.	
Petronius, Lucan.	

Waiters, tasters, etc. Some are talking.

NERO.

I will propose a question to the table:
Which of the arts is greatest? Lucan, these sausages
Are something new: try them.

POPPÆA.

You question, Cæsar,
Which of the arts is greatest? I would answer
The one which Cæsar honours.

TIGELLINUS.

But if Cæsar
Should honour more than one?

PETRONIUS.

The sausages
Are good enough. As for the arts, here's Lucan

Can speak for poetry.

Ner. If any man
Could prove one art beyond contention first,
I would reward him excellently. With me
To know the best and follow it are one:
Success being easy in all, my difficulty
Lies in distraction: show me then the best,
I'll perfect that.

Pop. What! Cæsar give up singing?

Ner. For better things.

Tig. Which be the arts?

Petr. (*to servants*). Here, vermin,
This wine's half-way to vinegar.

Ner. Who will name
The arts? There's sculpture, painting, poetry,
Singing . .

PARIS.

And acting.

Ner. Well, what more?

Tig. Horse-racing.

Pop. (*across*). Ruling I think's an art.

AGRIPPINA (*across*).

And making love.

Ner. 'Tis of the fine arts we would speak.
(*To servants*) Ho! fellows,

Pour out the wine! Ah, here's a lovely mullet.
Has this been tasted?

TASTER.

Ay, Cæsar. 'Tis stuffed with truffles.

Ner. A mullet stuffed with truffles. Now, Poppæa,
Will not this please?

Pop. I thank you.—(*aside*) Prithee, bid
Lucan to speak for poetry.

BRITANNICUS (*to servant*).

Nay, the mullet.

Ner. Lucan, what say you for your art?

LUCAN.

I claim
The first place for it, and I say 'tis proved
Nobler than any plastic art in this;
It needs not tools nor gross material,
And hath twin doors to the mind, both eye and ear.
Nay, even of drama Aristotle held,
Though a good play must act well, that 'tis perfect
Without the stage: which shows that poetry
Stains not her excellence by being kind
To those encumbrances, which, in my judgment,
Are pushed to fetter fancy.—Then hath our art
Such strong and universal mastery
O'er heart and mind, that here 'tis only music

Competes, and she is second far in scope,
Directness, and distinction.
Ner. You think that?
Luc. Ay, Cæsar.
Ner. Do you! you who have ever been
More gracious to my voice than to my pen!
Am I a better singer then than poet,
Think you?
Luc. Nay, Cæsar; but .....
Ner. Ha! then you are envious.
You would not have me write because, forsooth,
You write yourself. Now, by the god, I swear
Thou shalt not publish nor recite a verse
Within my empire till I give thee leave.
One man to keep the muses to himself!
Monstrous!
Pop. And serve him right.
Luc. (*aside*). Monstrous indeed!
Ner. (*to servants*). Heat me some wine.
Come, lords, ye drink not. Eh! what have we here?
Servant. Cherubim, Cæsar.
Ner. What is Cherubim?
Petr. The gods of the Jews.
Ner. Hoo! let us eat their gods.
They are much like pheasants.
Servt. 'Tis a pheasant, Cæsar,

And stuffed with woodcock.

Petr. Cæsar, there's one art
Has not been mentioned; though I think at table
It should not be passed o'er.

Ner. What art is that?

Petr. I shall contend it is the first of all.

Ner. Name it.

Petr. It hath no name. It scarce exists.
I think the goddess never walked the earth.

Par. Ranks she with poetry?

Petr. I avouch above.

Par. Cæsar, if this be proved, thou must rescind
Thy poet's sentence.

Ner. Let him prove it first.

Petr. I see in other arts some wit or fancy
Extrinsical to nature. I can find
No ground of need in any, save maybe
In architecture,—which ranks not so well
As to be mentioned by you.—Now, if I
Show you an art whose matter every day
Is life's necessity, which gives more scope
To skill than any other, which delights
Among the senses one which the other arts
Wholly neglect, would you not say this art
Hath the first claim? See, I could live without
The joys of harmony, colour, or form,

But without this it were impossible
To outlast the week.
Par. Oh! Cookery.
Several. Cookery, cookery!
Petr. There's the mistake I gird at. None of you
But thinks this art I speak of, which includes
Pleasures of entertainment, ease and elegance,
The mind's best recreation, the satisfaction
Of the body's nearest needs, the preservation
Of health, and with all this, the gratifying
Of that one sense, which above all the senses
Is subtle, difficult, discerning, ticklish,
And most importunate,—that this great art
Is a cook's province.
Ner. True, Petronius, true;
There's room for bettering these things.
Petr. Why, wine—
Just think of wine. A hundred vintages
Lie in my cellar; by my taste I tell
Each one; are eye or ear so delicate?
Par. Here's half a case already.
Petr. Then again,
Look on this side. You bid your friends to supper:
That is a promise; and hath all your life
An hour more suitable for skilful kindness?
They come perturbed, fatigued, hungry and thirsty;

Nature exhausts them for you, drains them empty
To take all kinds of pleasure; their grated nerves
Ask music, their wearied limbs soft cushioned couches,
Their harassed mind wise cheerful conversation,
Their body's appetites fawn at the word
Of food and wine: and yet we see these things,
Which should be studied, ordered, suited, measured,
All jumbled in confusion, till a feast,
Instead of relaxation and renewal,
Becomes, I say, for body and for mind
The worst discomfort and the stiffest trial
That life can show.

Par. Bravo! bravo!

Ner. For one,
I am converted. Thou shalt be henceforth
Arbiter of my table.

Br. (*to servt.*) 'Tis boiling hot;
Taste it.

Ner. (*to Petron.*) Accept you the office?

Petr. This would make me
A Cæsar above Cæsar.

Ner. In the province
Of imperial æsthetics.

Servt. to Brit. Pardon, your highness,
I will add water to it: 'tis yet unmixed.

[*They pour in the poison.*

Petr. 'Twill be a tyranny. For look, I hold
Man's stomach is not to be trifled with.
Not only should your table give delight
Even to the ravishment of every palate,
But since the end and final cause of food
Is not to breed diseases in the flesh,
Nor heat the spirits more than they can bear,
But rather to build up and comfort health,
I'd order first that there be served at table
Nothing but what is wholesome.

Br. (*after drinking while Petr. speaks*). Ah!
[*Falls back.*

Oct. The wine, the wine!

Br. Ah! [*Dies.*

Oct. He is dead. O dead! O dead!

Lucan, Petronius and Paris go to Britannicus. Domitia follows.—All rising.

Agr. What is this?

Ner. He hath a fit.

Petr. He doth not breathe.

Oct. (*has come round to front*). Alas, alas! my brother; he is dead.

Ner. Nay, sit you down; look not aghast, I say.
He hath the falling sickness, and will oft
Faint on a sudden, as ye see. He lies
An hour as dead, and then awakes again

With nought amiss. Best take him out in quiet.
(*To servants.*) Carry him from the room.
Luc. Lift you his feet, Petronius.
We two will take him.
Ner. Let him be, I say.
His servants will attend him. Return to table:
We cannot spare you.
Par. (*to Oct.*) Honoured lady, be hopeful:
For hath your noble brother e'er been taken
Like this, he may recover.
Oct. (*to Par.*) Never—
Never! O never! he is dead! I knew it! [*Going.*
Ner. (*to Oct.*) Heh, sit you down. What could you do, I pray?
He will come round.
Oct. Oh! I will follow him.
[*Exit with servants who are carrying Brit.*
Petr. (*to Par.*) How happened it?
Par. (*to Petr.*) He drank a draught of wine
Fresh mixed, and then fell back just as you saw.
What think you?
Petr. (*to Par.*) Think you 'twas aught?
Par. (*to Luc.*) What think you?
Luc. Impossible.
Dom. (*aside*). He is poisoned. Yet my sister
Was nothing privy to it. She is pale.

Ner. Come, sit you down, aunt: come, Petronius,
Lucan, be seated. Let not the horrid sight
Unwhet your appetites.
Petr. (*to Luc.*) That was no fit. [*To Par.*
He is dead. What if 'twere poison? Where's the drink?
Par. 'Twas hurried ut.
Luc. O God!
Ner. (*to servts.*) Serve out the wine.
We all must need a bumper; 'tis most natural.
I have known the mere revulsion to provoke
In a strong man a seizure similar
To that which frighted him.
Par. (*aside*). 'Twould not amaze me,
Had he such drink to cheer him. [*All refuse drink.*
Pop. (*to Nero*). I will not drink.
Ner. From my cup.
Pop. Well, from thine. [*Drinks.*
Luc. (*aside*). He is self-betrayed.
Ner. Where were we?
Petr. At the point where Cæsar made me
Arbiter of his table. I shall ask
To inaugurate my office.
Ner. Do so, Petronius.
Petr. Then know you are all dismissed. Let all go home,

And for the prince's safety offer up [*All rise.*
What vows ye may unto the gods. Myself,
I set the example, and go first. Come, Lucan. [*Going.*
Ner. Eh! eh! yet thus 'tis best. Good night,
Petronius,
Thou hast spoken well; may the gods hear thy prayers.
I wish you all good night.

In disorder of going curtain falls.

ACT · IV

SCENE · 1

The same. A public place. THRASEA and PRISCUS meeting.

PRISCUS.

I WAS coming to your house.

THRASEA.

'Tis well we meet.

How went it in the senate?

Pr. As you said.

A message read from Nero.

Thr. Seneca?

Pr. No doubt.

Thr. And in what terms touched he the murder?

Pr. With double tongue, as being an ill which none,
And Cæsar least, could have desired; and yet
A good none should lament.

Thr. He is very prompt.

What glozing for the hasty burial?

Pr. The speech was thus; that 'twas the better custom

Of simple times to shun all vain parade:
That private grief was mocked by frigid pomp,
And public business and quiet thereby
Idly disturbed;—*Then for myself*, it ran,
To have lost the aid and comfort of a brother
Demands your sympathy. Of your goodwill
I make no doubt; the more that my misfortune
Throws me upon it, seeing that all my hopes
Now anchor wholly on the commonwealth.
Wherefore to you, my lords, and to the people,
I look so much the more for maintenance
And favour, since I now am left alone
Of all my family, to bear the cares
Your empire throws upon me.

Thr. This was well.

Pr. Then were there gifts decreed to all his friends.

Thr. Hush-money. Did none murmur?

Pr. There were none
So much as frowned.

Thr. See, Lucan! let us speak with him.

Enter Lucan.

If now he be not shaken, I mistake
His temper.

LUCAN.

Good day, Thrasea.

Thr. A dull morning.

Luc. Comest thou from the house?
Thr. Nay, more's the pity.
There was a distribution, as I hear,
To friends of order. Say, how didst thou fare?
Luc. In many things, Thrasea, I hold not with thee,
Nor will pretend that I can see in virtue
A self-sufficiency invulnerable
Against the crime of others. I believe
The world is wronged, and burn to avenge the wrong.
But, as an honest man, I take thy hand.
Thr. I looked for this, Lucan, and take thy hand.
Frivolity and crime are most unworthy
Of thy companionship.
Luc. My uncle's hope
Tainted my judgment. I have been blind, and wronged thee.
Thr. Where I am misconceived I blame myself.
Luc. Hear me abjure.
Thr. Spare words. There's no more fear
Thou wilt be duped. Cæsar, in slaying his brother,
Has doffed the mask.
Luc. The heart of Rome must swell
To put the monster down.
Thr. We have our part:
But in the sorry tragedy he makes
We can be but spectators. On his stage

There's nought but folly. Come thou home with me:
I'll show thee how we may regard this play,
Take note of all the actors, and watch the end.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE · 2

The room in Domitia's house. Enter DOMITIA and PARIS.

DOMITIA.

'Twas a most shameful deed; we take upon us
A just revenge.

PARIS.

But 'tis the general thought
That Nero killed his brother; that his mother
Had no hand in it, rather would have saved him.

Dom. 'Twas her intrigues determined him, and they
Who egg on others are the real movers.
Now will he hate her more a thousand-fold
For driving him to crime. She will not 'scape:
Our plot will stand.

Par. Is it thy scheme to push
Silana's accusation?

Dom. Ay, 'tis that.
We shall accuse the Augusta of intent
To marry Plautus, to assert his claim,
And thus assail the throne.
Par. How wilt thou broach it?
Dom. We have fixed to-night. Cæsar will dine at home,
And with convenient company. 'Tis agreed
When he's well drunk, you enter, announce the plot
As freshly hatched, and so unmask the affair
That he shall be persuaded.
Par. How glibly, madam,
Speech can glide o'er the hitch; I must feel flattered
That just in the awkward place I am shovelled in
To carry it through, who have no heart in the matter.
Dom. No heart! had you no ear then to my promise?
Par. 'Tis little for the risk. But what of Burrus?
Dom. Seeing that without his name the plot were weak,
And that to avouch his treason would discredit it,
We say he is suspected.
Par. 'Twill not stand.
We lack confederates.
Dom. You forget Poppæa.
I have sent for her to try her. If I mistake not,
'Tis she that knocks. Get you behind the door,

And watch what passes. There! [*Paris hides.*

Enter Poppæa.

Now this is kind.

POPPÆA.

I am bounden, lady, to wait on Cæsar's aunt.

Dom. I count the days, Poppæa, when you yourself
Will call me aunt: and in that happy hope
I'll stand thy friend.

Pop. I shall have full need, madam,
Of all good offices.

Dom. Maybe: my sister
Is an unscrupulous enemy. Beware!
She stole from me a husband, and will now
Keep you from winning one.

Pop. She doth not hide
Her disapproval of my love to Cæsar,
And thus appears my foe; but in truth, madam,
Half of my heart sides with her, and the fear
Lest the full passion which I bear your nephew
May shame his rank, conquers my love so far
That oft I doubt if I have a heart to bear
The honour I have dreamed of, or a love
Worthy of him, since it so much can fear.

Dom. Tut, tut! if you're the woman that I think
You're just what I would wish his wife to be.

Wronged in his marriage, he since hath wronged himself:
Octavia is a ninny, but his low
And last intrigues have scandalized the court:
Our family is hurt. You are his equal
In wit and manners, and can hold your place;
Nor in opposing you is it his good
His mother weighs: rather it suits her schemes
To have his wife a fool. 'Tis not unknown
What lately she had dared to keep her place,
But that Britannicus' so sudden death
Blasted her plots: now in her constant project
Your marriage threatens her.
Pop. The more I see
It blackens more. May I dare ask you, madam,
To tell your sister that I willingly
Retire, if she prevail upon her son
Quite to forget his love and put me by?
Dom. Which side to take? that must you first determine;
'Tis Cæsar or his mother. I supposed
'Twas him you loved, not her. Now should I tell you
That she is deeply pledged to take his life,
And seize the empire . . .
Pop. Oh! what wicked crimes!
Impossible!

Dom. But if I prove it to you?
Pop. I could not hear it.
Dom. Nay, but if 'tis true,
Side you with us who hinder it, or her
Who pushes it?
Pop. O madam, 'tis incredible.
Dom. Ay, and to-night, as Nero sits at supper,
When Paris brings the news he'll not believe it.
But then a word from you might turn the scale,
And rouse his better judgment.
Pop. The very thought
That her destruction were my safety, madam,
Would hold my tongue. Indeed you have wronged me much,
Telling me this.
Dom. Why, such things you will hear.
Pop. Nay, let me go.
Dom. Ay, go, but think upon it.
Pop. Farewell. [*Exit.*
Dom. (*sola*). Was I mistaken?
Par. (*re-entering*). My mind is changed.
Dom. How now! what say you?
Par. Madam, the plot will stand.
Dom. Did you hear all?
Par. And saw.
Dom. All that compunction . . .

Par. Ay, be sure of it.
Why she and I could carry anything.
She's a born actress: we must keep good friends
With her.

Dom. Then this is well; go learn your part.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE · 3

At the tomb of Britannicus. Enter OCTAVIA and ATTENDANTS.

OCTAVIA.

Hang there, sweet roses, while your blooms are wet,
Hang there and weep unblamed; ay, weep one hour,
While yet your tender, fleshly hues remember
His fair young prime; then wither, droop, and die,
And with your changèd tissues paint my grief.
Nay, let those old wreaths lie, the shrivelled petals
Speak feelingly of sorrow; strew them down
About the steps: we mock death being trim.
Now here another. Ah! see, set it you:
I cannot reach. Have you not thought these roses
Weave a fit emblem—how they wait for noon
That comes to kill their promise, and the crown
Is but a mock one?

ATTENDANT.

'Tis a good custom, lady,
To honour thus the tombs of those we love.

Oct. Custom! Is this a custom? Then I think
I wrong my sorrow in such common shows.

Att. Nay, it doth ease affliction to be busy;
And grief, that cannot reckon with a mystery,
Is comforted by trifles.

Oct. Why, thou'rt wrong;
It brings no comfort.

Att. And 'tis kindly done
To hide the fresh-cut stone. Death is hard featured
In a new-built tomb.

Oct. O, hold thy peace! I see
Thou canst not be my comforter. Alas,
I blame thee not. But yet, whate'er be said,
Think not our gracious deed finds its account
In the honour done: the wreaths I bring were woven
More for myself; the tears I shed, I shed
The more abundantly that they are crimes
In the sight of him that slew him.

Att. Speak not so,
Lady; thou'rt o'er-distraught.

Oct. What would'st thou have me?
Knowing my sorrow thou should'st rather wonder,
And think it well that I speak sense at all.

Att. Let not such passion kill thy courage, lady;
The greatest die. There stands the tomb of Julius,
Whose mighty march was no less foully stayed
At noon of power: there is Augustus' tomb,
Wherein so many lie . . .

Oct. Why, what are they
To me? Is't not my brother that is dead?
Whose life was mine, as needful to my day
As is the sun; as natural, old a want
To very life as is the bathing air
That my blood battens on. Take these away
And give him back; it then were likelier
I should not gasp, fret, pale, nor starve, nor pine.
He is gone! O miserably, suddenly,
For ever; alas! alas!—See, who comes hither?

Att. 'Tis Agrippina, lady; and she carries
Wreaths such as ours.

Oct. Let us begone in haste.

Att. Alas! she hath seen us, lady: 'tis too late.

Oct. I'll but salute her. I pray you all keep back,
Nor speak with her attendants.

Enter Agrippina, Fulvia, and Attendants.

AGRIPPINA.

My dearest daughter,
I have longed for this embrace. Where else but here

Beside this sacred tomb should we have met?
I should have been much with thee in thy sorrow,
But am forbidden the palace.
Oct. I must thank thee
Doing this grace to my unhappy brother.
The gods grant thee kind messages. Farewell.
Agr. Nay, go not thus. See how I hang these garlands.
Oct. Not there, nay, not on mine; not there! thy grief
Must own a lower place; mix not its show
With mine. He was my brother.
Agr. Thou art right.
Set them here, Fulvia. If my heart is wronged,
'Tis done unwittingly; thou canst not know.
Oct. I leave thee.
Agr. Grant one word.
Oct. Would'st thou be kind
'Twill be but one.
Agr. 'Tis this then: I am kind.
In sum 'twas this I came to say.
Oct. If hither
Thou didst but come to seek me, know I had chosen
The hour to be alone.
Agr. My dearest child,
My injured child! See, I would have thee trust
My friendship. 'Twas my constant, loving wish

To right thy brother's wrongs, and now my heart
Is wholly turned on thee.
Oct. Think not of me.
Am I not past all help? nor do I crave
The help that leads to death.
Agr. O never dream
That I had hand in that accursèd deed.
The terror of it rather hath possessed
My purpose with the justice of revenge.
Oct. I cannot thank thee, and from thy messengers
Have gathered all. There's nought to say. Farewell.
Agr. Thou dost not know Poppæa marries Cæsar.
Oct. Ay.
Agr. Thou consentest?
Oct. Say, would my refusal
Or my consent be counted?
Agr. It shall not be.
Oct. It matters not.
Agr. Thou lookest for divorce?
Oct. Can I remain his wife who killed my brother?
Agr. Thou art the last branch of the house of Claudius,
And if thou wilt forget the hurt now done thee,
May'st yet retrieve thy blood; but being too proud,
Wilt more dishonour what thou seemest to honour.
If now thou'rt brave, and wilt join hands with me ....

Oct. O never, never! was it not that hand
That .... O my brother, with thy trait'rous foe
Make peace, and at thy tomb! Ask clemency
Of him that murdered thee! O never.—
Thou most dear shade, who wast too mild and kind,
If death seal not thy spiritual sense
To my loud sorrow, hear me! O thou my joy,
By whom the bitterness of life, my lot
Of horror, was quite sweetened,—cruelly,
Most cruelly slain. Ay, I will all forget
When he who wrought this thing can bring again
Out of thy cold unmotionable ashes
The well-compacted body and grace of life.
Ay, if he make one smile of thine, although
It last no time, I will forget: but else,
I say, the thing he hath done, since so tis done
That he cannot undo it, he must o'er-do
Ere I forget.

Agr. I will be yet thy friend—

[*Exit Oct. with Attendants.*

There comes no help from her. Maybe her grief
Is yet too fresh. Come, Fulvia, let us go.
She would not speak with me. Now on all hands
Thou seest I am set aside, and count for nought.
Yet not for this am I a whit discouraged;
I shall rise yet. Am I not Agrippina? [*Exeunt.*

SCENE · 4

A room in the Palace. Enter through a door from the supper-room NERO and POPPÆA.

NERO.

Now ere they follow, Poppæa, ease my heart,
And tell me thy request.

POPPÆA.

Thou'lt grant it me?

Ner. Whate'er it be, if thou wilt come to Baiæ.

Pop. I'll have it without bargain or not at all.

Ner. I grant it: ask.

Pop. 'Tis that you give my husband
The post in Lusitania which he begs.

Ner. 'Tis his. Would he were there.

Pop. My thanks.

Ner. I prithee
Call him not husband.

Pop. Ah, now I pierce this veil
Of generosity: why, when he goes
I must go with him.

Ner. Eh! if that's the case
I grant not his commission.

Pop. 'Tis a promise.

Ner. I had a promise once.
Pop. That was conditioned.
Ner. And what condition have I not fulfilled?
Pop. Heavens! is't forgotten?
Ner. Say, what have I lacked in?
Pop. Or did I dream 'twas promised me? 'Twas this;
Marriage.
Ner. By Juno, I will marry thee.
But come to Baiæ.
Pop. Nay; thine oath is vain
Upon the point of honour. There are things
Idle and ceremonial, and that count
In love as nought, but which alone can make
Divorce from Otho honourable, nay,
To me, I say, possible. Till the day
Octavia is divorced I am Otho's wife,
Ay, and am well content to be: he loves me,
And lacks in nothing that a gentleman
And lover should observe. I sometimes think
That you mistake . . .
Ner. Ah!
Pop. But to mistake in that!
Seem to forget! I fly.
Ner. O most impatient!
I have yet no pretext.

Pop. Nay, nor ever will.
Besides, your mother rules: she would not suffer it.
I have no desire to taste her dishes.
Ner. Hush!
They come.

Enter through the door Petronius, Tigellinus and Anicetus.

Where be the others?

TIGELLINUS.

They have taken
Cæsar's gracious permission, and gone home.
'Tis late.

Ner. Why, who art thou to say 'tis late?
Be seated, be seated. I'll tell thee, Anicetus,
More of my scheme anon; but for the present
We keep Minerva's feast at Baiæ; thither
Must thou convey the court. Combine high pomp
With masterly dispatch; our games shall reach
The limit of invention, and ourselves
Take part. To thee I say, come not behind.

ANICETUS.

Grant me the means to be great Cæsar's herald,
I'll make a wonder that shall fetch the nymphs
From their blue depths in ravishment to see

His ships upon the waters.

Ner. I shall be liberal,
And give thee full instruction. (*To Pop.*) Think, my love,
What could be pleasanter, now spring is come,
Than to confide our vexed and careful spirits
To nature's flush; to leave our memories
With the din and smoke of Rome, and force a pageant
Upon the lazy mirror of the bay,—
One to make Venus jealous, and confound
The richness of the season. Thou dost not guess
What I can do. Say, would'st thou miss the seeing
Of my magnificence?

Enter Paris.

Pop. See, here is Paris.

Ner. He comes to make us merry. The gods defend us!
He has seen a ghost.

Pop. He has something to deliver.

Ner. Patience! I know his mood: he will be tragic;
And you shall see the severe and tearful muse
Outstride her dignity, and fall along.
(*To Paris*) Begin!

PARIS.

Most mighty and most honoured Cæsar,

I cannot speak for shame.

Petr. Why, man, thou'st spoken.

Ner. He opens well.

Petr. Like the nurse in Seneca's tragedy.

Par. The tale I bring, my lords, is little suited
To make your sport.

Petr. No?

Ner. This is excellent.

Pop. I think he is in earnest.

Ner. 'Tis his art.

Par. I am a messenger now, and no actor,
Sent by your royal aunt Domitia
To unmask a thing, which, though the gods be praised
That in discovery have wrought prevention,
Is yet a damnèd plot . . . .

Ner. (*rising*). A plot, a plot! [*All rise.*
Stand off, stand off! a plot, thou say'st? a plot?

Pop. (*aside to Nero*). Pray heaven this prove not now
some fresh contrivance
Of the empress.

Ner. Stand all aside. Art thou in earnest?

Par. Pardon me, Cæsar. Did this plot concern
Less than thy life . . . .

Ner. My life! by all the gods,
Speak but his name who dares.

Par. Will Cæsar's ear

Grant me indulgence?

Ner. Speak, fool, or thou diest.

Par. The matter is disclosed by certain freedmen
Engaged by the empress.

Ner. Ah!

Pop. (*to Nero*). Said I not so?

Ner. Be this proved, 'tis the last.

Pop. (*to Nero*). Ay, till the next.

Ner. Paris, as thou would'st live another moment,
Speak now but truth.

Par. (*shows a paper*). See here the evidence.
If Cæsar read this, 'twill give certain colour
To worst suspicion. Here are writ the names.

Ner. Read me the names.

Par. Rubellius Plautus.

Ner. Ha!
Enough. I know 'tis true the villain's blood
Hath from Augustus equal claim with mine.
Who else?

Par. Balbillus and Arruntius Stella,
With Fænius Rufus, and your royal mother,
And some who 'scape the crime disclosing it.

Ner. I'll have their lives to-night.

Tig. I pray now, Cæsar,
Grant me this order.

Anic. Or me.

Ner. Nay, who are ye?
Go, Tigellinus, fetch me Burrus hither.
Par. I have his name set down with the conspiracy.
Ner. Burrus?
Par. 'Tis question of him, nothing certain.
Ner. Escort him here unarmed; I'll speak with him.
Tig. Cæsar, I go. [*Exit.*
Ner. Give me thy paper, sirrah.
What have we here? [*Reads.*
Petr. (*to Servt.*) Call me my servant there.
Anic. Wilt thou go?
Petr. Ay, 'tis sadly out of place,
This business at this time. Look, Anicetus,
Thou'rt new to Cæsar's suppers; let me tell thee
There's ever something wrong. See how he takes it!
Mad, mad!
Ner. (*aside*). I see. Plautus. This hits my life:
Britannicus being dead, that hope cut off,
She looks to Plautus' claim: and I to be
Poisoned or what appears not: yet I doubt not
Poisoned. 'Tis found in time. Now 'tis plain war;
The strongest wins. Poison! 'Tis life for life.
Nay, maybe already I have swallowed down
Some death-steeped morsel; ay, this very night
Have tasted of it, and the subtle drug
Runs in my veins concocting: my spirit sickens,

I faint and tremble. What is it?

Anic. (*advancing*). Cæsar, a word.

Ner. What would'st thou say?

Anic. (*to Ner.*) 'Tis I can do this thing.
None that be here lack will: I have the means.
'Twere easy, would you give me the command.

Ner. What would be easy?

Anic. Why, this thing that hangs,
Which you for Rome so wisely, and for you
Rome and your friends have wished. If but your foe
Step on a ship of mine, I'll beg my death
If it touch land again. We go to Baiæ,
And there upon the hazard of the sea
May this disorder sleep.

Enter Burrus with Tigellinus.

Ner. (*to Anic.*) I thank thy zeal;
There is no need; give way.—Burrus, thou'rt called
Upon a stern occasion. Is't not death
To any man or woman whosoe'er
That plots to murder Cæsar?

BURRUS.

Death deserved.

Ner. Here be the names of some who thus offend.
Thine is amongst them: of thine honesty
I am too well persuaded to demand

More proof than this, that thou do execute
All these conspirators to-night.
Bur. —Cæsar
Is not mistaken in me. Let me see
The names. [*Takes paper and reads.*
Par. (*aside*). Now may Jove blast the general's wits,
Else we be lost.
Petr. (*to Anic.*) Take my advice. (*going*).
Anic. (*to Petr.*) Nay, nay,
I'll see it out. [*Exit Petronius.*
Bur. (*aside*). What's this? Why, 'tis mere nonsense.—
What evidence hath Cæsar of this plot?
Ner. Confession of the traitors. Paris brings it
Fresh from Domitia.
Bur. Now, with your permission,
I'll question Paris.
Ner. Question! why, is't not plain?
Question is treasonous; and thou to question,
Whose name the black suspicion pricks! wilt thou
Question?—who hast the deepest cause of all
For sure conviction? Is't not horrible
That I, to whose security the empire
Looks for stability, should most of all
Live an uneasy and precarious life,
And find no remedy because my ministers,

Who should be over-zealous to protect me
Even from imagined danger, shut their eyes
And ears to plots and perils which I hear
My slaves and women prate of?

Bur. Cæsar, the matter
Demands inquiry. That you have been much wronged
Is clear: by whom is doubtful. Let me pray
You save your judgment from reproach of haste,
And hear what I advise.

Ner. Speak; I will hear.
Speak.

Bur. First dismiss the company: 'tis ill
To have had this audience.

Ner. Friends, you are all dismissed.
Begone without a word: this business presses.

Pop. (*to Nero*). Have some one with you, Nero; are you advised?
Keep a guard while you can.

Ner. (*to Pop.*) Nay, have no fear.

Pop. I would not trust him. Did not Paris say
His name was with the rest?

Ner. (*to Pop.*) Be not afraid.—
Good night, my lords. (*To Bur.*) Shall Paris stay?

Bur. No, none.

Ner. Paris, await without; the rest go home.

[*Anic. Tig. and Par. go out: Poppæa tarries.*

Pop. (*to Nero*). Oh, do not trust this man!
Ner. (*to Pop.*) He's not my enemy.
Pop. I fear to leave thee with him.
Ner. Have no fear.
Pop. Could he not kill thee?
Ner. Nay, nay.
Pop. Oh, he will.
Alas! alas! Oh! oh! [*Faints.*
Ner. Why, thou must go.
[*Exit Nero carrying out Poppæa.*
Bur. (*solus*). Be hanged! the fool's gone too.

Re-enter Nero.

Ner. Now, Burrus, now.
Art thou my friend?
Bur. —We are alone, and while
There's none to hear, you must excuse a soldier
If he speak plainly, Cæsar.
Ner. Indeed, Burrus,
Thou art my only friend; speak as a friend.
Bur. I have heard it said the German warriors,
Meet o'er their cups, and, hot with wine, resolve
Matters of state; but ere they put in act
Their midnight policy, they meet again
In morning hours to see if sober sense
Approve what frenzied zeal inspired. The custom

Has been applauded. Chance has given to you
The one half of the method: use the other.
Ner. I am not drunk.
Bur. Such wandering judgment, Cæsar,
Asks such excuse.
Ner. My judgment wanders not.
I am cool. My face is flushed? . . . .
Bur. How will this look
If, sitting here at table, at a breath
Of hearsay you commit to instant death
Your mother and four noble citizens,
With others of less note?
Ner. Choose I the time?
Shall the conspirators be pardoned then
'Cause Cæsar sups? or say Cæsar must fast
And touch no wine, lest when his blood be warm
Some treasonous practice creep into his ears,
And they who would befriend conspiracy
May point suspicion on his judgment! Now
Is a good hour for treason; Cæsar sups,
And must not credit it.
Bur. I do not blame
Your feast.
Ner. No more then: let it be to-night.
Bur. What! on a charge unproven?
Ner. Thou may'st prove it.

Bur. See, you acquit me; why not then the rest?
Ner. Acquit my mother! would'st thou persuade me, Burrus,
She can be acquitted?
Bur. Of the deeds she has done
She is guilty; for this action charged against her,
It is not hers.
Ner. Oh, more, much more is hers
Than thou dost dream. The crime men charge on me,
My brother's death, Burrus, indeed, I swear,
Though thou believe me not, yet if my part
In that were separate and weighed 'gainst hers . . .
I would not tell thee. . . Oh, I had been happy had I
But heard thee then.
Bur. Your peace even now as much
Hangs on good counsel. You are hot: be guided, Cæsar.
Ner. Nay, now thou'rt changed, thou'rt wrong: thou goest round
To the other side. If thou would'st give the advice
I need, I'd take it gladly. Listen, Burrus:
I have another secret; if I tell thee
Thou may'st befriend me. I will tell thee. Hark!
'Tis this: I fear my mother; I cannot sound
Her heartlessness; my terror shames the shows
And feeble efforts of my trust and love.

I have read her eyes—
Oh, there's no tenderness, no pious scruple
Writ in my favour there; nothing but hate.
To think that I am her son but whets to fierceness
Her fury, and her hellish plots are laid
More recklessly and safely that she deems
I am not knit of that obdurate nerve
To sear the tender place of natural love.
I would not do it, Burrus, though I fear her
And hate her, as I must; but let it end
Ere it be worse. I pray thee do it, Burrus.

Bur. The cause of fear is magnified by terror:
The present circumstance were amply met
By Agrippina's exile, which I urge,
As ever, now. But let such sentence rest
On proven crime.

Ner. Oh, thus were ne'er an end.
Done, we stand clear.

Bur. Thus done, 'twere a foul crime:
And if you have found remorse in what before
Was schemed in fear and haste, consider, Cæsar,
If you would thank me for subserviency
Did I obey; for your sake I refuse.

Ner. Eh!

Bur. I refuse.

Ner. I have other friends.

Bur. So be it.
Take my demission. But remember, Cæsar,
That he who fills my place, handles the power
That holds you up; he that hath strength to help
May find the will to hurt you.
Ner. I meant not that.
I trust thee, Burrus: I'll be guided by thee.
What wilt thou do?
Bur. The wisest course is thus:
To-morrow Seneca and I will go
With chosen witnesses to Agrippina,
And lay the charge. If she draw quit of it,
Well; but if not, I promise that her place
Shall not win favour of me.
Ner. Dost thou promise?
Bur. I promise that.
Ner. And if there be a doubt,
Thou'lt wrest it to my side?
Bur. I promise that.
Ner. 'Tis death.
Bur. Ay, death.
Ner. If that be thy last word
I am free. I would I had more such friends as thou.
But bring it not back; take all my power. Thou saidst
I had no cause for fear?
Bur. What should you fear?

Ner. I think thou'rt right.

Bur. Now, Cæsar, I will leave you.
Your spirits are much moved.

Ner. Indeed I swear
I am not moved. There was no need to blame
My supper, Burrus.

Bur. Nay, I blamed it not.

Ner. I am not sensible to wine as others.
Of all I meet there's none, no, not the best,
Can eat and drink as I. There's something, Burrus,
In that. I think if I, who rule the world,
Could not enjoy my wine, that were a blemish
Which scorn might hit.

Bur. I never blamed your supper.

Ner. Hadst thou been there, thou would'st have praised it well.
I have learned much lately in these things. Petronius,
Ay, he's the man—I'm blessed in this Petronius.
Thou know'st him?

Bur. Ay, and would not keep his hours.
'Tis late, to bed.

Ner. Well, Burrus, I'll to bed.
But thou must sup with me. I'd gladly have thee
One of our party. I shall tell Petronius.

Bur. Cæsar, good night.

Ner. By heaven, I had forgot;

Where did I leave Poppæa? I remember.
Good night, Burrus, good night. [*Exit.*

Bur. Now may brave Bacchus
Reclaim the field; for me, I'll gather up
This quenched brand, and be off. What must men think
Of Cæsar, who would fetch him with such trash?
The Augusta marry Plautus! Master Paris
For this will need his wit to save his skin. [*Exit.*

SCENE · 5

A small room in Agrippina's house. Enter AGRIPPINA and FULVIA.

AGRIPPINA.

My days are weary, Fulvia. Know you not 2231
Some art to make time fly? another month
Of prison and neglect would kill me quite.

FULVIA.

Is't not the change more than the solitude
Vexes your majesty?

Agr. Nay, I was never made

For isolation, and even by my friends
I am utterly forsaken.
Ful. Junia Silana
Was very constant, tho' we have not seen her
Now for four days.
Agr. Bah! she's my foe. I wronged her
That way a woman ne'er forgives. 'Twas I
Broke off her match with Sextius, you remember.
Ful. Your true friends dare not come: they stand aloof,
Watching the time to do you service, madam.
Agr. You speak of Pallas: there's none else.
Ful. The lot
Of late befallen your majesty is such
As all our sex have borne, who have not raised
Nor much demeaned themselves beyond the rest.
Agr. True; but 'twas never mine; I made escape.
They that would lock us up in idleness,
Shut us from all affairs, treat us as dolls
Appointed for their pleasure; these but make it
The easier for a woman with a will
To have her way. Life lacks machinery
To thwart us. Had I been a man, methinks
I had done as well, but never with the means
I have used. Nay, nay, 'tis easy for a woman,
Be she but quick and brave, to have her will.

Enter Servant, who speaks to Fulvia, and she to Agrippina.

Burrus and Seneca you say! Admit them.
Fulvia, here's one apiece: make your own choice;
I've none, and can be generous. Pray come in.

Enter Burrus and Seneca with two others.

Come in, my lords, come in. You are very welcome.
Look, Fulvia, now if Mercury have not heard
Our prayers and sent us noble visitors!
Pray you be seated. Alas, in this poor house
I fear I cannot show you the reception
You and your gallant followers deserve.
'Tis not what thou'rt accustomed to at home,
Seneca, I know: pardon it. Thou lookest cold.
Come near the fire: pray heaven this bitter weather
May not have touched thy chest. A Gallic winter!
I can remember no such fall of snow
In March these twenty years; but looking back,
I find one noted in my journal then.
How goes your health, my lords?

SENECA.

Well, thank you, madam.

Agr. I am very glad: your visit is well meant;
It cheers me much.

BURRUS.

The truth is, madam, we come
At Nero's order.

Agr. Ha! then I strike you off [*Rising.*
My list of friends again. I thought as much;
I wondered how you dared me this affront
In my last poor retreat, here where I sit
Alone and friendless, in the worst disgrace
Woman can suffer;—ay, and caused by you.
But learn that, if nought else, this house is mine;
If 'tis so small that it can welcome little,
It can exclude the more. At Cæsar's order
Ye have forgot your manners, now at mine
Resume them. Ye have done his hest, begone!
Begone!

Sen. I pray you, madam, hear the message;
We may not leave without delivering it.
Burrus will speak it.

Agr. Oh—Burrus speak it.
If Burrus speak, the affair is mighty black.
There's none like him to break an ugly business.
[*Sitting.*
Hey! Well, we have nought to do, so let us hear
The last of the court. Octavia's divorce?

Sen. Believe me, lady, I feel much aggrieved
In all that hurts you here.

Agr. Stranger than fiction.
Now what's the matter?
Bur. There has been information
To Cæsar of plots against his life, the which
The informers charge on you. This the chief item,
That you have entered with Rubellius Plautus
Into conspiracy to set him up
In Nero's place, and to dethrone your son.
I come with Seneca and these witnesses
To hear the answer, which your majesty
No doubt hath very ready, and accordingly
To acquit you of the charge.
Agr. —Excellent!
Now, Seneca, 's thy turn; or will these gentlemen?
Fulvia, we have depositions to be made:
Fetch pens and paper; all shall be in order.
Sen. Madam, remember on what past occasions
Cæsar hath shown suspicion, and believe,
Whate'er your innocency, there is cause
To make it clear.
Agr. Thy prudence, Seneca,
Is vanity, not kindness; spare it, pray.
Here is your paper, gentlemen: I'll give you
Matter for Cæsar's reading. Tell me first
Who's my accuser?
Bur. There are two—the first

Junia Silana, the other is your sister
Domitia: they bring forth as evidence
The informers, certain freedmen, Atimetus,
Iturius, and Calvisius, who affirm
That you have lately been on terms with Plautus,
Stirring him up to make an enterprise
Against the state; that you, by marrying him
(Who by the mother's side may claim a line
As rightly from Augustus as doth Nero),
Might reinstate yourself, dethrone your son,
And bring disaster to the commonwealth.
That is the charge, of which we are come to hear
The refutation, not to press the count.

Agr. Pah! You're a brace of idiots, if ye think
This needs refuting. Who's Silana, pray,
That if she speak, the very bonds of nature
And heaven must be repealed to give her credit,
Saying a mother plots to kill her son?
I marvel not that she, being childless, dares
Avouch such madness, never having known
How near the affections of all mothers are,
Nor that a mother cannot shift her love
Like an adulteress;—nay, nor do I wonder
That she should find among her freedmen those,
Who, having in luxury spent all their substance,
Will for the promise of the old lady's purse

Sustain the accusation: but that for this
I should be seriously held suspect
Of the infamy of parricide, or Cæsar
Of giving ear to it, this I marvel at.
As for Domitia, I would thank my sister
Even for her jealousy, were but the strife
One of good will and kindness towards my Nero.
But now she wastes her time with her man Paris,
Composing as 'twere fables for the stage.
Let her go back to Baiæ and her fishpools;
They kept her trifling spirit well employed,
When by my efforts Nero's first adoption,
Proconsular authority, consulate,
And other steps to empire were procured.
Are ye now answered?—
Or is there any can be brought to show
That I have practised with the city cohorts,
Corrupted the loyalty of the provinces,
Solicited the freedmen to rebellion?
Or to what purpose think ye? Had Britannicus
Been Cæsar, then I grant I might have lived;
But if 'tis Plautus, or whoever else
Should get the power, how should I lack accusers
To charge me, not with words escaped in passion,
But deeds and crimes—crimes—ay, Seneca, crimes,
Of which I could not hope to be acquitted

Save as a mother by her son? And ye
Think I shall here defend myself to you!
Send Cæsar to me. By the gods I swear
I'll be revenged on all who have had a hand
In this most cowardly and senseless plot.
I wait him here: tell him that to none other
Will I resolve this matter.

Bur. Be content
To say so much in form, that our report
Suffice for your acquittal.

Agr. I bid you go.

Bur. Cæsar shall hear your message.

Sen. Madam, we go.

Agr. Ay, go, good fellows; though ye have roused my passion,
Your coming here hath cheered me wondrously.
Nay, if ye have ever such another matter,
Bring it again; be not abashed, but come;
Or send your wives, and those two gentlemen,
Whose names I know not. My lords, your humble servant.

[*Exeunt Burrus and Seneca and two Gentlemen.*

Plautus! now is it possible I was wrong
Not to have thought of Plautus? No, I laugh,
'Tis merely laughable. At forty-five
To marry a pretender; and Plautus too!

He would not have me. Fulvia, do you think
That Plautus wants to marry me? Ha! ha!
Is it my beauty, think you, or my virtue,
Or my good fortune tempts the stoic? Oh,
Domitia, oh, you are dull. I cannot fear
This plot. We shall retire with more than honour.
'Twas strange, I think, that Pallas was not struck;
His name escaped.

Ful. There is ample reason, madam.
They say that in his house he holds such caution
As not to speak before his slaves. His orders
Are given by nod and sign, or if there's need
He writes: there's none can say they have heard him speak.

Agr. May good come of it. 'Twould be hard indeed
If they should exile Plautus for a fear
Lest I should marry him. That were a fate
Of irony. Why, give the man his choice
Of marrying me and exile, would he not
Fly to the pole? Poor Plautus! marry Plautus!

Both. Ha! ha! ha! he! he!

Enter Nero. Agrippina is seated.

NERO.

I find you merry, mother; the gods be praised
That you deny the impeachment.

Agr. Really, Nero,
Burrus' memory is getting very short
If he said I denied it. I did not.
Ner. You did not?
Agr. Nay, I'd not be at the pains.
Ner. Called you me hither?
Agr. Ay, you seem misled.
I guess who 'tis. But let that pass. I hoped
I might advise you privately; I knew
You would not wish it known. Now, was I wrong?
Ner. Do you deny what is affirmed against you?
Agr. No, son: for if you wished to take my life,
Why should I rob you of this grand pretence? 2420
Yet since you cannot, and the charge itself
But moves my laughter, as you overheard,
My only wish is you should now retire
With dignity, and act as Cæsar ought.
Ner. (*aside*). This then is added to my shames.
Agr. What say you?
Fulvia, await without. [*Exit Fulvia.*] Who brought
this to thee?
Ner. Paris.
Agr. The player! when?
Ner. Last night at supper.
Agr. Tell me, didst thou believe it? is it possible?
Thou didst! Whence gottest thou thy wits I wonder;

Certain they are not mine, no, nor thy father's :
I think they came of Claudius by adoption.
Dost thou believe it still?

Ner. Whate'er I have done
Was on advice.

Agr. A pious caution truly.
Is this thy trust? Yet, yet I must forgive thee.
See, I was angered. Nay, 'twas not thy judgment :
I know who leads. But for these foolish women
I sentence exile.

Ner. Sentence whom to exile?

Agr. The two devisers. Yet I think my sister
Is harmless; but the other, that Silana—

Ner. Silana must be banished?

Agr. Judge her, Nero,
When thou hast heard. She and thy aunt Domitia
Have been the two who, in my sad retirement,
Have visited me most. Day after day
They have made a show of kindness, finding joy
In my disgrace, to view it; and have but left me
To try this trick.

Ner. (*aside*). 'Tis plain I have been fooled.

Agr. For those that brought the tale, thou knowest that they
Must taste the penalties they sought to inflict;
That thou must know; but 'tis not all. The acquittal

Of those accused will not be full without
Some honour shown them. Best among the names
Stand Fænius Rufus and Arruntius Stella,
Who may have city posts: gentle Balbillus,
Who has long deserved it, must be paid at last
With a proconsulate. For myself, thou knowest
I have taken all disgrace so patiently
That I expect some boon, though yet I fear
To ask; but when I have seen my slandered friends
Honoured, I'll write it thee.

Ner. I shall be quick
To punish and to make amends. 'Tis just
Towards Burrus, I should tell you from the first
He took your part.

Agr. What could he else? Now, Nero,
I have done: go home, and there resolve the matter
With common sense; take Burrus into counsel
As to what penalties and what promotions
Shall be distributed. Before the people
Remember that some feeling must be shown,
And anger for effronteries attempted
Against your majesty. Now go, the affair
Has somewhat tired me.—Nay, touch me not; farewell.

Ner. I see you are right; farewell.

Agr. I have more advice,

Which I will write to thee. [*Exit Nero.*
Excellent this—I have not had my way
Thus for a long long while: ay, now is my time
To strike. I'll venture with a letter to him
And claim my boon, that he dismiss Poppæa.
There's much to say on that which may seem aimed
More at his good than mine; and if she have plunged
In this false step, his vanity being touched
May shake his liking. I will do it at once. [*Exit.*

SCENE · 6

A room in the Palace. Enter NERO and POPPÆA.

NERO.

All for thy sake was planned, and now my pleasure
In scheming thine is fled; for what is Baiæ,
And what Minerva's feast, blue skies and seas,
Or games, or mirth, or wine, or the soft season,
If thou deny me? Prithee say thou'lt come.

POPPÆA.

Nay, I'll not go.

Ner. Thou wilt not?

Pop. Nay, I cannot.

Ner. Cannot to Cæsar?

Pop. Prove me then thou'rt Cæsar,
And not a ward.
Ner. A ward!
Pop. I said a ward.
May I not see thee vexed? 'Tis what men whisper,
Who dare not vex thee. Well, thy mother's child,
So much that at her beck thou forfeitest
Empire and liberty.
Ner. Wouldst thou enrage me!
What dost thou mean, Poppæa?
Pop. Deny not that:
If 'tis not that hinders our marriage, then
The case, I fear, blackens. I, who can smile
At that, must weep another cause. I'll think
Thou'rt tired of me.
Ner. Now by what sign?
Pop. Maybe
Thou hast seen a better beauty, and repented
The promise given to me.
Ner. O treason, treason!
Pop. Thinkest my blood unworthy of alliance
With thine—tho', truth, my ancestors have triumphed.
Ner. Who dares that lie shall bleed.
Pop. Or that our bed
Is not like to be blest.
Ner. The fruitful gods

With all their oracles avert the omen.

Pop. Or that I urge my marriage for advancement;
And thou, doubting my love, pressest denial
To proof of faith.

Ner. Ay, that is it; thou'st hit it.

Pop. Or that I, once thy wife, would cross thy mother,
Divulge her crimes, the hate the senate bear her,
And last, though that's well known, how she hates thee.

Ner. Speak of this once for all, then let the jest
Be dead.

Pop. Nay, 'tis no jest, for Agrippina
Will never love a daughter who loves thee.
Restore me to my husband. I were happier
In any place, howe'er remote from Rome,
Where thy disgrace and wrongs can but be spoken,
Not seen and felt as here. See why I go.

Ner. Poppæa, since I have never hid from thee
My quarrel with my mother, thou mayst know
It draws to end.

Pop. Oh, is't the turn for kindness?
Hath she been kind again? Why, 'tis deception.
When her plot failed she cast it off, and now
Exults: 'tis her fresh confidence seems kind.

Ner. 'Twas not her plot. Or else I'd rather think
She put the snare to catch my foolish aunt,
Who blindly took the bait.

Pop. Then she pretended
Treason, that she might better hurt her sister:
And yet can win thy trust!

Ner. Nay, heaven forbid;
I trust her not.

Pop. She hates me.

Ner. Nay, her kinship
Is jealous for Octavia; but . . .

Pop. Ah, true!
To kill one's husband, plot against one's son,
Should leave unsatisfied some tender feelings
To spend upon a step-child. Why, she knows
Those arts which manage you would not gull me,
A woman not her child. Her whole design
Is bent to thwart our marriage; and she will.
I know it.

Ner. I swear that were this proved against her,
Came it to a question 'twixt herself and thee,
Which to take, which to lose, then not a moment
Would I delay: the blow I have often sworn
To strike should fall.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

A letter from the Augusta. [*Exit.*

Pop. Now, as she loves me, this is mine.

Ner. Not so.

Pop. Then as thou lovest me.

Ner. Well.

Pop. (*reading*). Ho! ho! ho! ho!
Now shines the sun at noon.

Ner. What is't?

Pop. I read?

Ner. Read then.

Pop. (*reads*). *To her dearest son.* Ha! ha! ha! *When last we met thou wilt remember to have confessed some shame for wrong done to me. The wrong I forgive, but eagerly seize on thy sorrow to ask of thee, in regard for thine own happiness, this only favour. 'Tis my earnest prayer and advice that thou dismiss Poppæa.* 2551

Ner. Ha! writes she so?

Pop. Attend, the reasons follow.
(*Reading.*) *Beware of her: nor think that I grudge thee the happiness which thou now findest in her. Marriage with her can lead only to thy misery. I know her well.*
Now hear my character.

Ner. Give me the letter.

Pop. She is vain, deceitful, self-seeking, and, being by nature cold, hath the art to assume the mask of passion; and 'neath the show of virtue designedly conceals her wickedness and mischief. She loves thee no better than she loves Otho. 2561

Ner. Give me the letter.

Pop. Nay, one sentence more.

Believe a woman sees further than a man, since to her eyes beauty is no veil.

She grants me beauty then. [*Gives letter to Nero.*

Ner. (*reading*). 'Tis so, 'tis so. Ye gods! and thou wert right.

Poppæa, this is the end. Come not to Baiæ.

Wait my return.

Pop. What's now to do, I pray?

Ner. Ask not: when I return I shall be free.

We will be married.

Pop. Will you banish her? 2570

Ner. Ask nothing.

Pop. From her exile still her plottings

Will reach to Rome.

Ner. Not so, for she shall go

Whence nothing reaches Rome.

Pop. Oh, now I fear

I have said too much; let not my love o'ercome thee.

Maybe she meant not this.

Ner. Thou meddle not!

Pop. Oh, but at least no crimes, Nero, no crimes!

Promise me that; rather I'll fly to-night.

Ner. Poppæa, in earnest of the happy day

When thou wilt be my wife, I bid thee now

Depart.

Pop. (*kissing him*). Husband, I go. [*Exit.*

Ner. What ho! what ho!

Enter a Servant.

Is Anicetus in the palace?

SERVANT.

Ay, Cæsar.

Ner. Go, bid him hither straight. [*Exit Servant.*

It shall be done.

Ay, now it shall be done. Let me consider;
I must be cool, lest I be foiled once more.
Where lies my hindrance? not in her; she has twice
Deceived me and escaped: now in my turn
I steal her weapon, and can use it better,
Having been plain before. Then Seneca . . .
He shall not know, so are his scruples quiet.
For mine, they are hushed already; but 'twere best
Recount the terms which reason can oppose
To too rebellious nature: first there's my motive,
Huge as the earth; liberty, happiness,
Empire: that cannot slide, I fear not that.
Then there's the ground of justice; Claudius' death,
O'er which the executive too long hath slept
In Cæsar's piety: the sentence now
O'ertakes the murderess with a double score,

Since she by her conspiracy contrived
Britannicus should die . . . ay, for his death
The heavy penalty hangs o'er some head;
Now let it fall on hers,—so I am quit.
All this condemns her, long-expected justice
Cries, and occasion hurries on the hand.
Ay, ay, I am clear. Poppæa being my stake,
I cannot shrink nor swerve. What was't she wrote?
Why here is more. [*Reads.*

Be with me in this matter,
But if thou should'st refuse, we are worse foes.
She dares the threat.

Enter Anicetus.

ANICETUS.

Cæsar hath summoned me.

Ner. Good Anicetus, tell me, is there none
Greater than Cæsar?

Anic. Nay, Cæsar, there is none.

Ner. But were there one to whom it might be said
Cæsar owed life and fortune—dost thou take me?

Anic. Cæsar would say the Augusta.

Ner. Nay, thou'rt dull:
'Twas thee I meant.

Anic. Me, Cæsar!

Ner. Dost remember
Boasting to me that thou hadst sailor means

To do a certain thing?

Anic. Ay.

Ner. Do it now.

I'll owe thee life and fortune. Canst thou be trusted?

Anic. My love for Cæsar follows hand in hand
With his command in this.

Ner. Then do it, I say;
No words, no explanation. Agrippina
Will come to Baiæ: there have thou thy ship.

Anic. I will have one at Bauli, one at Baiæ:
If she take either it shall serve the turn.

Ner. Go now contrive thy means; let nothing 'scape thee
To me or any other: when 'tis done
Hold thy head high.

Anic. Cæsar, I go to do it. [*Exit.*

Ner. Now comes my part: ay, though it vex my soul
To stoop; tho' this be Cæsar's greatest wrong,
That he must patch his faultless power with guile,
And having all command, miss of his will
But for a subterfuge .... yet for this once
I'll do it—'tis little; but to write a letter,
Feign to discard Poppæa, as mistrusting
Her love and character; and from that vantage
I surely win my mother to come forth
And join the court at Baiæ—she will come.

ACT · V

SCENE · 1

Baiæ. A room in Agrippina's villa; the back gives out on the sea, where a galley is seen moored to quay of villa. AGRIPPINA *and* FULVIA.

AGRIPPINA.

Is not this charming, Fulvia? what a day!
I feel I have never breathed spring air before.
And how the people cheered! it did me good.
Here's my old seat. The villa's looking well.
Could but Domitia see us now! How smoothly
Her little plot went off! My first suspicions,
Fulvia, I am sure were wrong: this invitation
Was most well meant; and see the tenderness
Has even called up my tears. You cannot know
What fond associations make this house
A home indeed. I wish I had not refused
To take the yacht at Bauli: 'twas an error,
Over-precaution.

FULVIA.

Madam, I but told you

The very words Seleucus .... [*A noise without.*

Agr. What is that noise?

Ful. 'Tis Cæsar coming with a company.

Agr. Oh, I will see. (*Looking forth.*) And there is Seneca

And Burrus. There's much meaning in this visit.
How grand he looks with all his lords about him!
There never was a Cæsar like him: others
Have been but Cæsars; he's an emperor,
And wears the full magnificence of state
In beardless boyhood.—Fulvia, I do love splendour.
To be so young and rule the world!

Enter Nero, Seneca, and Burrus.

Now, welcome,
Welcome, my son!

NERO.

Welcome to Baiæ, mother.
We are come the first day of the feast to pay you
The season's compliments.

Agr. A prompt return.
What pleasure 'tis, Nero, I cannot say.
Welcome, my lords.

SENECA.

My loving service, lady.

Ner. Crossed you the bay from Bauli?

Agr. Nay, you'll laugh;
'Twas foolish; but I wished the folk to see
My joy and reconcilement, and in the thought
To please so many friends I kept my litter.
Ner. You'll all sup with us?
Agr. I look for nothing better.
Ner. Whom will you bring?
Agr. I have no one with me here
But Polla Acerronia.
Ner. And where is she?
Agr. She took the yacht, and so arrived before us,
But has not left it: like the child she is,
The new toy quite distracts her: she is there.
Ner. Row you this afternoon upon the bay?
Agr. I had thought of it; and now, if you would come
That were a double pleasure.
Ner. I am sorry, I must go
Order to-morrow's games.
Agr. Your lords mayhap
Will join me. I can take them to your villa.
Sen. I'll gladly come: the dust the crowd treads up
Has filled my throat and set me coughing shrewdly.
Ner. Nay, I shall want you both.
Agr. Some other time
I hope, my lords.

BURRUS.

I thank your majesty.

Ner. Farewell till supper.

Agr. Why! so short a visit!

Ner. We shall meet soon.

Agr. Well, I will sail alone
With Polla; 'tis her wish. Escort me, Nero?

Ner. Ay.

Agr. For the sake of that I'll go at once.
I love the sea.

[*Exeunt Nero with Agr. and Fulv. down the quay, where they are still seen.*

Sen. Burrus, what say you now!
Has not the thing I looked for come to pass? 2690

Bur. There's as you say a most astounding change;
Can you explain it?

Sen. Well, you see it, Burrus.

Bur. How came it all about?

Sen. See now how tenderly
They both embrace.

Bur. Who would have thought it?

Sen. I;
I should have thought it: and I point to this
To justify my words those many times
Our speech has come to difference.

Re-enter Nero. Fulvia goes into house.

Ner. Now, lords, I go.

Bur. and Sen. We follow, Cæsar.

Ner. I have changed my mind; I want you not. [*Going.*

Bur. Will Cæsar name the hour When we shall wait on him?

Ner. Why, come at once. I cannot tell what hour I may not want you. Attend me at my villa. [*Exit.*

Bur. Of a sudden He is changed again.

Sen. You see how easily He is overcome with kindness. Would you know The noble sacrifice he has made?

Bur. What's that?

Sen. Why, he has renounced Poppæa.

Bur. Nay!

Sen. Ay.

Bur. Who told you?

Sen. I saw the letter.

Bur. How! Poppæa shows it?

Sen. 'Twas writ his mother.

Bur. Then he has deceived her.

Sen. Can you think that?

Bur. The letter makes all plain.
Why did he write it?
Sen. Why?
Bur. Well, well.
Sen. Oh, Burrus,
I have every cause for hope; and here to-day
The meeting in this house more than assures me
He must redeem the promise of his youth.
'Twas in this very room, ten years ago,
I first saw Nero—Ay, 'tis now ten years—
I was arrived from Corsica at Rome,
And there found summons to attend the Augusta
At Baiæ: hither in all haste I came.
The yearnings and the miseries of exile
Would make a mean deliverer seem a god,
And my return drave me half mad with joy.
I entered: in that chair sat Agrippina,
My kind deliverer, my friend, the empress.
Time had not marred her beauty, and as she spake
Impatience flushed her cheek—she shared my joy.
I knelt in tears there, nor ashamed of tears,
Though at her side I was aware was standing
A boy of some twelve years; whom, when I rose,
She then presented as her son, and bade me
Take him for pupil. As I saw him then
In fullest grace of boyhood, apt in all

Boys should be manly in, and gifted further
Than boys are wont with insight, and the touch
Of human sympathy and learned taste,
Proficient in some arts and dull in none,
But coy withal and generous, 'twas no wonder
If ere that evening passed I had admitted
The schemes his mother had laid, which in short time
Were brought to pass.

Bur. 'Twas a black day.

Sen. And yet,
Burrus, if after you had seen how kindly
He took instruction, how he came to love me,
You would not wonder—nay, I can remember
Claudius himself was shamed if his Britannicus,
Being younger but by some two years, were by
Where Nero was: and had I been the father
I might have wished, I think, to have done as he,
And called the best my son.

Bur. He killed Britannicus.

Sen. Burrus, if as it seems you quite distrust him,
Why hold you still the office which establishes
His power?

Bur. Because it is an office, Seneca,
The top of my profession: yet, by the gods,
Find you a better man, and I'll be gone.
But, as a soldier, I'll not see the guards

Commanded by some brute like Tigellinus.

Sen. Nay, be not angry.

Bur. Would not you be angry
Thus to be questioned?

Sen. Nay, indeed, by habit
I question oft myself.

Bur. Then, for one question
I'll be appeased. I know you, Seneca,
For a man of many parts, a scholar, poet,
Lawyer, and politician, what you will;
A courtier too besides, a man of business,
A money-maker; in short, a man of the world,
That like a ship lifting to every wave,
Heeling to every blast, makes good her way
And leaves no track. Now what I ask is this:
How ride so lightly with the times, and yet
Be the unbending stoic, the philosopher,
The rock, I say, that planted in the deep
Moves not a hair, but sees the buffeting breakers
Boil and withdraw? Which is the matter, Seneca?
Nay, 'tis a pertinent and friendly question—
I'll take your answer as we go along.

[*Exeunt Burrus and Seneca.*

Re-enter Fulvia.

Ful. Of all delights I think that liberty

Is the prime element: nothing is pleasant
Joined with a must. Why, even this journey hither
That has so cheered my mistress, all the talk
Of sky and fields and trees, tired me to death.
I'm sick of servitude, with 'time for this'
And 'time for that': I'd give my ears for freedom;
[*She sits in Agrippina's chair.*
To have my servants, and say—Prithee, Fulvia,
What is o'clock?—Fetch me the little kerchief
I left upon my bed—Come, Fulvia, quick;
I want you—Fulvia, go, order my litter—
Fulvia, be gone; we've business—Fulvia, stay,
Amuse me for a while.—I would to heaven
I were in Rome again! (*Shouts heard.*) Hey, what a noise!
Cheering my lady! here's a change indeed.
Well, I shan't lose by that. Gods, how they cheer!
She might have taken me with her. I know well
I shan't see the outside of these villa walls
Till bound for home. And here no visitors,
At least for me. Cheer on, my lads! and yet
If I should get the chance I'd like to see
These famous Neapolitans: I'm told
They're wondrous saucy, and ingenious singers.
What's that? a boat! my lady! gracious heavens!
[*A boat rows up to quay.*

My lady, O my lady, what's the matter?

Enter Agrippina up from the quay, clothes dripping; the boat remains.

Agr. An accident, and I am escaped by swimming:
Yet thou must know, Fulvia, 'twas a contrivance
To take my life—the kindness was all hollow—
A dastardly contrivance: 'twas the ship
Seleucus spoke of. Look, I am hurt in the shoulder,
Yet 'tis not much.

Ful. Alack, alack, my lady!

Agr. I am cold and faint. I must at once go shift
These dripping habits. When I am rested somewhat
Thou shalt hear all: meanwhile, call in the sailors
Who rowed me hither: get from them whate'er
They saw or know, and promise a reward
Worthy of my deliverance. [*Going.*

Ful. Praised be the gods,
My lady, that thou'rt safe.

Agr. (*turning*). Polla is killed. [*Exit.*

Ful. What, Polla! Killed! she said killed. Polla killed!
Ho! fellows, come within, nay, come within.

Sailors enter.

SAILOR.

We are not fit, my lady. By thy leave,

We are poor fishermen.

Ful. Come, fellows, come.
Which is the captain?

Sail. Me, so please thee, lady.

Ful. Ye have brought the empress safe, and for that service
Shall have a good reward. But, tell me now,
How came she in your boat?

Sail. 'Twas thus, my lady.
It being the feast, we smartened up the boat
And pulled her close along the shore, to find
A party of landsmen, such as love to visit
Misenum, or be rowed across the bay
To Pausilypum, lady, and Virgil's villa.
When, as we lay, the Augusta's galley passed,
Not half a cable's length, and then we cheered,
And after took no note of her, till Gripus,
He cries, Look! see the galley. And there she was
Laid on her beam-ends in the offing. Ho!
We cried, and gave the alarm, and led the chase
To reach her first: when presently she righted,
Steadied, and trimmed her oars, and drew away.
While we were wondering and talking of it
I spied a something floating, and again
Putting about, saw 'twas a swimmer's head.
Four other boats with ours made for it too;

But we gave way with a will and held our own,
And coming alongside, found 'twas the Augusta.
I reached her out an oar, and I and my mate
Lifted her in handsomely. Then she bad us
Straight row her hither. She's a most brave lady,
Ay, and can swim.
Ful. Know you no more?
Sail. No, lady.
We looked, but saw naught else, not even a spar.
The Augusta told us there was none but she.
Ful. What was the reason why the galley heeled?
Sail. I cannot tell.
Ful. What could it be?
Sail. D'ye see,
My lady, 'tis the Admiral's boat, this galley.
It's not for me ....
Ful. There's not a breath of wind.
Sail. The mischief was aboard.
Ful. You know no more?
Sail. Nothing, my lady.
Ful. Then begone; to-morrow
Come for your recompense. I know not yet
The Augusta's pleasure.
The Sailors. Thank thee, thank thee, my lady.
[*Exeunt Sailors.*
Ful. 'Tis plain the men know nothing.

Sailor (*returning*). Please thee, lady,
If not too bold, we'll ask thee if the Augusta
Has taken harm from being so long in the water.

Ful. Thank you, my men. I pray she's none the worse.

Sail. 'Tis bitter cold, indeed. But I can tell
She's of good stuff; ay, and can swim.

Ful. Be sure
You are fortunate to have done her this good service.

Sail. I make my humble duties. [*Exit.*

Ful. Alas, alas!
What can this mystery mean? I die to hear.
I must now go attend her; ah! here she comes.

Enter Agrippina.

Agr. Fetch me some wine and a warm coverlet;
The fur one from my bed.

Ful. Ay, madam, quickly. [*Exit.*

Agr. I have no friend here but her and the few servants
Upon the place: 'tis plotted well indeed
To catch me thus alone: Mistress Poppæa
Is seen in this. Yet being escaped, I think
I yet will prove her match.

Re-enter Fulvia.

Ah, thank you, so.

Ful. Are you recovered, madam, from the shock?
Agr. I am warm again. I think too that my hurt
Is very little: but I am somewhat shaken.
Ful. What is it that hath happed? The sailors knew
Nothing but that they found you.
Agr. Did they see
Nothing?
Ful. They saw the galley lurch, and say
The Admiral must know.
Agr. 'Tis likely enough
'Twas his contrivance. Now I'll tell thee all,
Fulvia, and thou must help me all thou canst
When thou hast heard: indeed I tell thee partly
To clear my judgment.—We had rowed about a mile,
Polla and I, and sat upon the poop,
Taking our pleasure, when, all on a sudden,
Darkness; the awning fell, with such a crash
As took away my spirits, and Polla and I
Were thrown down from our couches by the weight
Of falling cloth and spars: one heavy beam
Grazed my left shoulder, and we lay crushed down
Upon the deck. Then I heard Polla laugh,
Finding we were not hurt, and she crept forth
Forward, beneath the curtains; the oars stopped:
I heard a rush of feet, and presently
Came Polla's voice, 'Hold, slay me not, ye villains,

I am Agrippina.' Then, 'Ah me, I am slain!'
And one long deathly groan. This, when I heard,
Taught me my part, and towards the other side,
Crawling, I came to the window o'er the stern,
Where lay my only escape; and silently,
Feet foremost, I crept out, and by the ladder
Slipped down without a sound into the sea.
The galley still held way, and in few strokes
I saw that I was left and unperceived;
And so swam on until the fishermen
Hailed me by name, and took me in their boat.

Ful. Who can have laid this plot to kill you, madam?

Agr. 'Tis Nero, Fulvia, he who seemed but late
So kind and dutiful: 'twas all hollowness,
Part of the plot, to bring me here alone,
Away from friends: ay, and perceive this too,
To lay my death to charge of an accident,
And hide, maybe, even my dead body, drowned
And lost in the depths of the sea. Now, being alone,
I shall need thee to aid me.

Ful. Dearest madam,
What can I do?

Agr. Thou must be faithful to me
Whatever happens. Hearken, I said 'twas Nero
Had done this: 'tis not so; my real enemy,
The mover, is Poppæa. I blame not Nero:

I bade him to discard her: he was driven
To choose between us: she hath carried it.
But being escaped, and she not here, I yet
Can right myself with him. 'Tis not too late;
Nay, I can amply trust those broad affections,
Which 'twixt a mother and her son remain
At bottom, spite of all. Ay, they remain.
The common knowledge of this guilty attempt
Will clear the way: and when I show the path,
He will be glad to escape. I have writ a letter,
Which, if he read, will work. 'Tis pure submission.
Remember, we must ever speak of this
But as an accident. Here is the letter;
Send Agerinus with it straight to Cæsar;
Of all my servants he's the one must bear it:
Nero has known him from a child, will trust him;
Nay, he hath rid so oft upon his shoulders
That he is half a brother, half a father.
Send him at once: I have bidden him await:
He should be here.

Ful. Alas, this is a day
Of sorrow indeed. I pray Minerva guard
Her feast from ill. [*Exit with letter.*

Agr. Indeed I have little fear,
If he but read. Yet now, after this warning,
I must beware. 'Tis plain the people love me;

They cheered me so. My escape will add to favour.

Ful. (*re-entering*). He waited at the gate, and with full speed

Runs with the letter.

Agr. Come; one business

Must now be not neglected; there's poor Polla.

Bring pens and ink and wax: we will seal up

All her effects, and make an inventory

In proper form, and do whate'er we may

While we have time. Let us go see to it. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE · 2

A room in Nero's villa. A table with papers. Enter NERO, SENECA, BURRUS, *and* TIGELLINUS.

NERO.

We have an hour: sit down, my lords, we'll hold

A privy council. I have in my mind a matter

Touching the subsidies.

BURRUS.

The day is good

For market matters, 'tis Minerva's peace:

The sword is sheathed.

Ner. (*to Servants*). Set light upon the table.

SENECA.

To talk of subsidies hurts no man's conscience.
What is the business, Cæsar?

Ner. I am vexed
By the complaints against the imperial household
In the gathering of tolls.—Here in these papers
Are weighty charges 'gainst Pomponius
Silvanus, and Sulpicius Camerinus:
Read them at leisure. But I ask you first
Whether there be not cause for discontent
In present management?

Sen. 'Tis a deep evil.
But never was the empire better governed;
Nor is there more extortion now, I think,
Than ever was.

Ner. And were there no extortion?

Sen. Nay, while you farm the taxes there will be
Extortion still.

Ner. You all think that, my lords?

Sen. Ay, ay.

Ner. And so say I. You have my grounds.
Now hear my scheme, by which for once and all
I rid the empire of this blot. 'Tis this.
I will have no more tolls or tallages,
Customs or duties levied: nay, not one
Through all the empire. I will make this present

To the human race : I say, their old vexation
And burden shall away.

TIGELLINUS.

Magnificent.

Sen. 'Tis generously meant, most generously.
But is it possible ?

Ner. Why not ?

Sen. The treasury,
Eased of this sum, must fill the deficit
By other means. If you cut off the customs,
You must increase the tributes, rates, and rents.
If one shoe pinches, 'tis no remedy
To stuff both feet in the other.

Ner. But my scheme
Has precedent ; there was no tallage taken
Throughout all Italy for some six years
Ere Julius.

Sen. Ay, but he restored the customs
As needful.

Ner. Whence they seemed the price of empire.

Sen. Unjustly. In the times of greatest liberty
Consuls and tribunes have ordained new customs,
Which yet remain.

Tig. I praise the scheme.

Ner. (*to Bur.*) And you ?

Bur. Where look you then for revenue?
Ner. The rents,
We'll have the rents. The land . . . .

Enter Messenger with Officer of the Guard.

Why, who is this?
Whence come you, man?

MESSENGER.

Cæsar, from Anicetus.
He asks great Cæsar's pardon ere I tell.
Ner. Thou'rt free to speak.
Mess. There has an accident
Befallen the Augusta's yacht.
Ner. Hey! what was that?
Mess. At a lurch of the ship the awning fell and dragged
The Augusta overboard.
Ner. Speak, man, speak on.
Mess. We thought her drowned.
Ner. Ha!
Mess. But by the grace of the gods
She is escaped.
Ner. Escaped!
Mess. She swam to shore unharmed.
Ner. Thou wretch,
And comest thou here in thy master's place

To bate mine anger? Forth and send him hither.
Fly, or I kill thee.

Mess. Pardon, great Cæsar, pardon.
The Admiral follows and will straight be here.

[*Runs out.*

Ner. (*aside*). Escaped! after such boast, escaped!
I am lost.—
To have done this thing had tried me; to have attempted it
And failed is ruin.

Sen. (*aside from Nero*). What is this?

Bur. (*to Sen.*) 'Tis clear
Cæsar knows what: and her escape not being
His pleasure tells us that 'twas not his purpose.

Sen. (*aloud*). Alas, alas!

Ner. What friend there cries Alas?
Who now stands by me? who will aid me now?

Tig. If Cæsar make his will but known . . .

Ner. Thou dullard!
I need the brains of them that know my will. 3011
Now is no time for parley. Seneca,
Speak what thou thinkest.

Sen. Cæsar, I am so much grieved that . . .

Ner. What's thy pain
To mine? Speak, man!

Sen. Alas, what shall I say?

Ner. How hast thou guessed this thing without a word,
And yet hast not foreseen it?
Sen. Oh, is't then true?
The letter false; the Augusta hither brought
But to be drowned!
Ner. See if ye know it not.
Sen. Let her escape belie thy guilty purpose.
Ner. Why, nay, the failure damns a thousand-fold
More than her death—I am henceforth the man
Who would have killed his mother, and could not.
Sen. Alas, alas!
Ner. Hast thou no word but that?
Thou that hast ever warned me, ay, and gone
So far upon this path that thou hast sought
To dull the natural feeling which so long
Held off my hand, hast argued 'gainst repugnance,
Crying, 'tis she that is the guilty one,
The dangerous one, there is no peace with her:
And now the day the thing thou hast foreseen,
Ay, and hast led me to, is done, thou'rt silent.
Hast thou no word?—Thou that wast ever ready,
Hast thou no word?—What strikes thee on a sudden
Dumb? Be my counsellor now that I need thee.
Speak now! Why, thou dost weep! surely thou weepest!

Burrus, what sayest thou ?

Bur. This mischief, Cæsar,
Being thus arisen is the Augusta's death.
Though I bewail the occasion, yet I say
'Twere most untimely justice to endanger
The public peace for her whose life hath been
So long the shame of justice. Since the sentence
We know is just, and that necessity
O'errides the common forms, the less delay
The better. Let her die.

Ner. I thank thee, Burrus.
How were this best performed ?

Tig. Now, if none speak,
I'll say that Burrus, being the advocate
Of what is planned, and as pretorian prefect
Possessed of means, is fittest for the work.

Bur. Look not on me, Seneca, as if to say
'Tis well; as if 'twere thy thought that my office
Covered this deed. I pardon Tigellinus,
That, unacquainted with a soldier's honour,
He thinks it passable in time of peace,
Entering in private houses there to slay
Defenceless citizens. But that the guards
Would thus lay hands on one that bears the name
Of Agrippina, that they could forget
Their loved Germanicus, who would think this ?

To such a deed they would not follow me,
Far less another; and if Cæsar now
Look for it from me, lo, I here throw down
My prefecture to any man soe'er
Who durst with this condition take it up.

Ner. Nay, Burrus, I'll not ask thee that. Thou'rt right.

And yet, if thou could'st do it— See here the man.

Enter Anicetus in haste, Paris following.

Thou hast been my ruin!

ANICETUS.

Pardon, Cæsar, pardon.
I am strangely foiled. Give me one hour, and yet
I'll make amends.

Ner. If thou canst make amends,
Come hither, speak with me. [*They go aside to front.*

Bur. Is the thing known?

PARIS.

Ay ay.

Ner. (*to Anic.*) What canst thou do?

Ani. I have set a guard
Around her villa, fearing lest the people
Should force their way within, or she escape.
Give me the word and I will slay her there.

Ner. Fool, I can give no word. Think when 'tis done,
If I should punish thee less for that deed
Than for thy late misdoing. What is this?

Enter Officer of the Guard. Petronius follows.

OFFICER.

The Augusta, Cæsar, sends a freedman hither,
One Agerinus, with a letter.

Ner. (*to Anic.*) Now
What to do?

Ani. Bid him enter: when he comes
I am prepared. Lend me thy dagger, friend (*to Tig.*).
[*Takes Tigellinus' dagger.*

Enter Agerinus, who runs to Cæsar.

AGERINUS.

Lo, Cæsar, I am sent . . .

Ani. Ha! where's thy hand?
Ay, as I thought, a dagger well concealed
Under his cloak.

Age. Indeed, indeed, good sir,
I have no dagger.

Ani. How no dagger? See!
Had I not caught thee! Ho! the guard, the guard!
Take him to prison till he can be questioned.

Age. You do force treason on me. Cæsar! Cæsar!
[*He is borne off by Guards.*

Ani. This villain having come, as he confessed,
From the empress armed, will Cæsar leave the enquiry
Now in my hands?

Ner. I do.

Ani. With me who will!

Tig. I follow, lead the way.

[*Exeunt Anicetus and Tigellinus. Paris follows them. Exit Nero within doors.*

PETRONIUS.

What will they go to do?

Bur. 'Tis thus: the Admiral
Has gone to kill the Augusta.

Petr. Gods forbid!
His orders?

Bur. Humph!

Petr. Why, men, what thing ye do!
He is shamed for ever.

Bur. Ay, and were't not done
Were shamed no less.

Sen. Alas! 'tis true, 'tis true.
And thou wert right, Burrus; but dost thou well
Permitting this?

Bur. I see 'tis necessary,

And am not shamed to say I think the thing
Itself is good. As for the motives, Seneca,
Ay, and the manner of it, to defend them
I shall not meddle.

Petr. (*to Sen.*) And thou wilt take thy share?

Sen. 'Tis not my counsel.

Petr. 'Twill be held as thine,
And rightly, seeing that thou let it not.
I could have stayed it.

Bur. Nay, be not so sure.
And if thou could'st have let it, could'st thou too
Prevent the consequences?

Petr. But remember,
She is his mother. Oh, I thought him better.
Is it too late now think you, if I ran . . .

Bur. They are there by now. Believe 'tis for the best.
If she should live but till to-morrow morn,
'Tis civil war. Consider what a party
Would stir upon the tale of Claudius' death,
Or to revenge Britannicus. I say
There's nought to gain.

Petr. Why, 'tis his mother, Burrus,
His mother. I'll be sworn he had not dared
Thus to commit himself had I been by.
He that should be a model to the world,
The mirror of good manners, to offend

Thus against taste!

Bur. If 'twere no worse . . .

Petr. Why, see,
There are a hundred subtle ways by which,
Had Cæsar done the thing, he had not been blamed.
This vulgar butchery displays to all
The motive, which so hurts your sense of right
That ye neglect the manner. Why, I say,
A just attention to the circumstance
Would hide the doing; but thus done, the doing
Proclaims the deed. And is't not plain that ye
Must share the guilt? Seneca, look for that.

Sen. 'Tis very well for you, Petronius,
To take upon yourself the criticism
And ordering of appearances, and say
'If aught goes ill, blame me.' You lay your hand
On any object you mislike, remove it,
Replace it as you will, can please yourself:
Nay, you can blame their taste who are not pleased.
But he who deals with men, and seeks to mould
A character to that high rule of right
Which so few can attain, he works, I say,
With different matter, nor can he be blamed
By any measure of his ill success.
His best endeavours are like little dams
Built 'gainst the ocean, on a sinking shore.

Nature asserts her force—and the wise man
Blames not himself for his defeat. For me,
Much as my soul is grieved, ay, and my pride
Wounded—tho' yet, I thank philosophy,
I can be glad for that,—my hopes—for this
I mourn—my hopes blasted; yet, hear me say,
I take unto myself no self-reproach,
Nay, not a tittle of the part of mischief
A vulgar mind might credit to my score.
I have done my best, and that's the utmost good
A man can do; and if a better man
Had in my place done more, 'tis perverse Fortune
That placed me ill. Thus far I argue with you,
Who look on me askance, and think my heart
Is tainted; as if I would in such case
Do such thing, as—poison my brother at table,
Contrive to kill my mother: 'Tis so far
From possible, that to my ears the words
Carry no sense: nay, and I think such crimes
May seem more horrible to other men,
Whose passions make them fear them, than to me
Who cannot think them mine. As for the rest,
I stand with you, and never from this hour
Shall mix with Cæsar more with any hope
Of good. Indeed I have hoped too long, and yet
The end has come too soon.

Re-enter Anicetus, Tigellinus, and Paris.

Tig. 'Tis done, 'tis done.

Ani. Where is Cæsar?

Bur. Within.

[*Anicetus and Tigellinus hurry within.*

Petr. Paris, is it true?

Par. The Augusta lives no longer,
Most brutally and miserably slain:
Yet died she bravely.

Petr. And why wentest thou
To soil thy hand?

Par. I went not to take part:
But Fortune holding nature's ruffians up,
I took their pattern.

Sen. Say, who did the deed?

Par. I'll tell thee what I saw. As forth we went,
The coward Tigellinus, pale as death,
In needless haste foremost where was no danger,
Hurried us on so fast, that thro' the street
We scarce kept pace, but when he reached the wall
Of the garden, and saw there the soldiers placed
By Anicetus, knowing not their purpose,
He shrank behind. These men being bidden seized
The servants; then we entered, and with us
Came the centurion. Within the room
Sat Agrippina with a single maid,

Who seeing the Admiral's sword fled past us out:
At which the Augusta called to her, 'Dost thou,
Fulvia, desert me too?' Then to the Admiral
She spoke. 'If here thou comest to enquire
From Cæsar of my health, know I am well,
Recovered from my shock, and little hurt.
But if, as your men's looks would mean, ye are come
Deeming that Cæsar wills that I should suffer
The like I late escaped, know you mistake.
'Twas not of his contrivance, and my foe
In this is his.' None answered, and awhile
Was such delay as makes the indivisible
And smallest point of time various and broad;
For Agrippina, when she saw her lie
Fail of its aim, ventured no more, as knowing
There was no wiser plea; but let her eyes
Indifferently wander round her foes,
Counting their strength. Then looked I to have seen
Her spring, for her cheek swelled, and 'neath her robe
Her foot moved; ay, and had she been but armed,
One would have fallen. But if she had the thought
She set it by, choosing to take her death
With dignity. Then Anicetus raised
His sword, and I fled out beyond the door
To see no more. First Tigellinus' voice,
'To death, thou wretch!' then blows, but not a groan;

Only she showed her spirit to the last,
And made some choice of death, offering her body,
'That bare the monster,' crying with that curse,
'Strike here, strike here!'
Sen. Alas, poor lady,
Was that the end of thy unscrupulous,
Towering ambition? Thou didst win indeed
The best and worst of Fortune.
Bur. Give her her due,
Such courage as deserved the best, such crimes
As make her death seem gentler than deserved.

Enter Nero between Anicetus and Tigellinus.

Ner. My lords, 'tis done. Nay, look not grieved.
There's none
Suffers as much as I; all share the good.
And think not that to keep the world at peace
I grudge this sacrifice: the general care
I set before my own, and therefore bid
There be no public mourning, nay, to-morrow
We shall attend the spectacles and games,
Appear as usual before the people:
Ay, and I partly look, my lords, to you
That I be well received. Good night to all!

ACHILLES
IN
SCYROS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THETIS . . . *Mother of Achilles.*

ACHILLES . . *disguised as* PYRRHA.

LYCOMEDES . . . *King of Scyros.*

ULYSSES . . . *Prince of Ithaca.*

DIOMEDE . . . *companion of Ulysses.*

ABAS . . . . *servant to Ulysses.*

DEIDAMIA . . *daughter of Lycomedes.*

CHORUS of SCYRIAN MAIDENS.

The scene is on the Island of Scyros, in the gardens of the palace.

Thetis prologises.

ACHILLES

THETIS.

THE deep recesses of this rocky isle,
That far from undersea riseth to crown
Its flowery head above the circling waves,
A home for men with groves and gardens green,
I chose not ill to be the hiding-place
Of my loved son. Alas, I could not take him
To live in my blue caverns, where the nymphs
Own me for queen: and hateful is the earth
To me, and all remembrance, since that morn,
When, in the train of May wandering too far,
I trafficked with my shells and pearls to buy
Her fragrant roses and fresh lilies white.
Accurst the day and thou, ah, wretched Peleus,
Who forcedst me to learn the fears that women
Have for their mortal offspring: who but I,
Thetis, Poseidon's daughter, who alone

But I of all the immortals have known this,
To bear and love a son in human kind?
And yet not wholly ill is the constraint,
Nor do I pity mortals to be born
Heirs of desire and death, and the rich thought
Denied to easy pleasure in the days
That neither bring nor take; tho' more to me
Embittered with foreknowledge of a doom
Threatened by fate, and labour how to avert.
For to me, questioning the high decrees
By which the sweetly tyrannous stars allot
Their lives and deaths to men, answer was given
That for my son Achilles there was ruled
One of two things, and neither good; the better
A long and easy life, the worse a death
Untimely-glorious, which should set his name
First of the Greeks;—for so must seem to me
Better and worse, so even an earthly mother
Had for him chosen, tho' for the right he died,
And conquered all the gods that succour Troy.—
But when I, thinking he must share my fear,
Showed him the choice, he made a mortal plunge
For glorious death, and would have straight gone forth
To seek it; but in tenderness for me,—
Whom without shame he honours, and in this
My love repays,—he to my tears consented

To hide him from his fate; and here he dwells
Disguised among the maidens like a maiden;—
For so his beauty and youth permit,—to serve
The daughter of the king of this fair isle,
Who calls him Pyrrha for his golden hair,
And knowing not prefers him o'er the rest.
But I with frequent visitings assure me
That he obeys; and,—for I have the power
To change my semblance,—I will sometimes run
In likeness of a young and timorous fawn
Before the maiden train, that give me chase
Far in the woods, till he outstrip them all;
Then turn I quick at bay with loved surprise,
And bid him hail: or like a snake I glide
Under the flowers, where they sit at play,
And showing suddenly my gleaming eyes,
All fly but he, and we may speak alone.
Thus oft my love will lead me, but to-day
More special need hath brought: for on the seas
I met at dawn a royal ship of Greece
Slow stemming toward this isle. What that might bode,
And who might sail thereon, I guessed; and taking
A dolphin's shape, that thro' the heavy waters
Tumbles in sport, around the labouring prow
I gambolled, till her idle crew stood by
To watch me from the wooden battlements.

And surely among them there full soon I saw,
Even as I feared, the man I feared, agaze
With hypocrite eyes, the prince of Ithaca,
That searcheth for Achilles: of all the Greeks
Whom most I dread, for his own endless wiles,
And for Athena's aid. Him when I saw,
Lest I should be too late, I hither sped
To warn my son, and here shall meet him soon,—
Tho' yet he hath not come,—for on these lawns
The damsels of the court are wont to play,
And he with them. Hark! see! even now. Nay, nay.
Alas! who cometh thus? Ah, by that gait
Crouching along, it is my persecutor,
Ulysses. Woe is me! I must fly hence.
Tho' he should know me not, I fear to face him,
My hated foe, alert, invincible
Of will, full of self-love and mortal guile. [*Exit.*

Enter Ulysses from the bushes, followed by Diomede, who wears a Lion's skin.

DIOMEDE.

We have made the circuit of the hill, and here
Into the gardens are come round again.
What now?

ULYSSES.

Hush thou! Look there! Some one hath seen us.

He flies.

Dio. I see not.

Ul. Where the myrtle tops
Stir each in turn. He goeth toward the shore.
I must see him that seeth me. Bide thou.

[*Exit among the bushes.*

Dio. Were I a dog, now, I might learn. Heigh ho!
Two hours and more we have wandered on this mountain,
Round and round, up and down, and round again,
Gardens, and lawns, meadows, and groves, and walks,
Thickets, and woods, the windings of the glades,
I have them all by rote. Each petty rill
We have tracked by rocky steps and paths about,
And peeped into its dank and mossy caves.
What sort of game should this Achilles be,
That we should seek him thus? Ah! back so soon?
What sport?

Ul. (*re-entering*). Well hit. 'Twas but a milk-white doe,
Some petted plaything of the young princess,
That fled our stranger steps.

Dio. And whither now
Turn we to seek Achilles?

Ul. Hark, Diomede:
My plot is laid and ready for thine ears.

Thou madest offer of thine aid; be patient,
And hear me.

Dio. I will hearken.

Ul. First, thou knowest
How since the day the Danaan kings took oath
To avenge the wrong done by the Trojan Paris
Against his host, the Spartan Menelaus,
One oracle hath thwarted us, which said
Our purpose should not prosper with the gods
Unless Achilles the young son of Thetis
Should lead our armies.

Dio. Certainly, so far
I am with you.

Ul. Next, when he was sought in vain,
Men looked to me; ay, and to me it fell
To learn that he was lurking in this isle
Of Scyros, in the court of Lycomedes.
The king denied the charge, adding in challenge,
That I might come and make what search I pleased;
Now mark . . .

Dio. I listen, but thou tellest nothing.
Why search we not the court if he be there,
Instead of this old hill?

Ul. 'Tis that I come to.
King Lycomedes hath been one of those
Who have held their arms aloof from our alliance,

On the main plea of this Achilles' absence.
What if he play the game here for his friends,
And hide the lad lest they be forced to fight?
Dio. That well might be. And if the king would hide him,
Thy hope would hit upon him thus at hazard?
Ul. Call me not fool. Attend and hear my plot:
Nor marvel, Diomede, to learn that he,
Whom the high gods name champion of the Greeks,
Lurks in the habit of a girl disguised
Amid the maidens of this island court.
Dio. That were too strange. How guess you that?
Ul. My spies,
Who have searched the isle, say there's no youth thereon,
Having Achilles' age of sixteen years,
But is well known of native parentage.
Now Thetis' son must be of wondrous beauty,
That could not scape inquiry; we therefore look
For what is hid, and not to be disguised
Save as I guess.
Dio. If this be so, thy purpose
Is darker still.
Ul. I lead thee by the steps
I came myself to take, slowly and surely . .
And next this, that 'twere dull to ask the king

To help to find the thing he goes to hide:
Therefore the search must be without his knowledge.
'Twas thus I sent up Abas to the court,
Idly to engage him in preliminaries,
The while I work; my only hope being this,
To come myself to parley with the maidens;
Which to procure I brought with me aboard
A pedlar's gear, and with such gawds and trinkets
As tickle girlish fancies, I shall steal
Upon them at their play; my hoary beard
And rags will set them at their ease; and while
They come about me, and turn o'er my pack,
I spy. If then Achilles be among them,
The lad's indifference soon will mark him out;
When, watching my occasion, I'll exhibit
Something that should provoke his eye and tongue.
If he betray himself, thou being at hand . . . .

Dio. Why, 'tis a dirty trick.

Ul. Not if it wins.

Dio. Fie! fie!
In rags and a white beard?

Ul. No better way.

Dio. The better way were not to lose the hour
Hearkening to oracles, while our good ships
Rot, and our men grow stale. Why, you may see
Imperial Agamemnon in the eyes

Of all his armament walk daily forth
To take fresh note of sparrows and of snakes:
And if he spy an eagle, 'twill make talk
For twenty days. Would you have oracles,
Give me the whipping of the priests. Zeus help me!
If half the chiefs knew but their minds as I,
There'd be no parleying. I'll to war alone
And with my eighty ships do what I may
'Gainst gods and men. Ay, and the greater odds
The better fighting.

Ul. Now 'tis thou that talkest.

Dio. Tell me then why we are prowling on this hill.

Ul. Excellent reasons. First that when I come
I may know how to come, and where to hide
From them I would not meet: and thereto this,
That if Achilles fly, he should not take us
At too great disadvantage: thou mayst head him,
Knowing the ground about, while I pursue.
He must not scape. But hark, 'tis time the plot
Were put to proof; already it must be noon;
And I hear steps and voices. Let us return
To the ship. If they that come be those we seek, . . .
Hark, and 'tis they,—we can look back upon them.
I'll be amongst them soon.

Dio. 'Tis a girl's game.

[*Exeunt into the bushes.*

Enter Deidamia, Achilles as Pyrrha, with the chorus of maidens.

DEIDAMIA (without).

Follow me, follow. I lead the race. [*Enters.*

CHORUS.

Follow, we follow, we give thee chase. [*Entering.*

Deid. Follow me, follow.

Ch. We come, we come.

Deid. Here is my home;

I choose this tree: this is the ground
Where we will make our play. Stand all around,
And let us beg the dwellers in this glade
To bear us company. Be not afraid,
(I will begin) sweet birds, whose flowery songs
Sprinkle with joy the budding boughs above,
The airy city where your light folk throngs,
Each with his special exquisite of love,—
Red-throat and white-throat, finch and golden-crest,
Deep-murmuring pigeon, and soft-cooing dove,—
Unto his mate addrest, that close in nest
Sits on the dun and dappled eggs all day.
Come red-throat, white-throat, finch and golden-crest,
Let not our merry play drive you away.

Ch. And ye brown squirrels, up the rugged bark
That fly, and leap from bending spray to spray,

And bite the luscious shoots, if I should mark,
Slip not behind the trunks, nor hide away.—
Ye earthy moles, that burrowing in the dark
Your glossy velvet coats so much abuse;—
Ye watchful dormice, and small skipping shrews,
Stay not from foraging; dive not from sight.—
Come moles and mice, squirrels and skipping shrews,
Come all, come forth, and join in our delight.
Deid. Enough. Now while the Dryads of the hill
Interpret to the creatures our good will,
Listen, and I will tell you a new game
That we can play together.—As hither I came,
I marked that in the hazel copse below,
Where we so oft have hidden and loved to go
To hear the night-bird, or to take unseen
Our noontide walks beneath the tangled screen,
The woodcutter hath been with cruel blade,
And of the tasselled plumes his strewage made:
And by the mossy moots the covert shorn
Now lieth low in swathe like autumn corn.
These ere he lop and into bundles bind,
Let us go choose the fairest we may find,
And of their feathered orphan saplings weave
A bowery dome, until the birds believe
We build a nest, and are come here to dwell.
Hie forth, ye Scyrian maids; do as I tell:

And having built our bower amid the green,
We will choose one among us for a queen,
And be the Amazons, whose maiden clan
By broad Thermodon dwells, apart from man;
Who rule themselves, from his dominion free,
And do all things he doth, better than he.
First, Amazons, your queen: to choose her now:
Who shall she be?
Ch. Thyself, thou. Who but thou?
Deidamia.
Deid. Where then were the play,
If I should still command, and ye obey?
Ch. Choose thou for all.
Deid. Nor will I name her, lest
Ye say my favour sets one o'er the rest.
Ch. Thy choice is ours.
Deid. If then I gave my voice
For Pyrrha?
Ch. Pyrrha, Pyrrha is our choice.
Hail, Pyrrha, hail! Queen of the Amazons!
Deid. (*To Ach.*). To thee I abdicate my place, and give
My wreath for crown. Long, my queen, mayst thou live!
Now, fellow-subjects, hie we off at once.

ACHILLES.

Stay, stay! Is this the privilege of the throne?
Am I preferred but to be left alone?
No guard, no counsellor, no company!
Deidamia, stay!

Deid. Thy word must be
My law, O queen: I will abide. But ye
Forth quickly, as I said; ye know the place.

Ch. Follow me, follow: I lead the race.
Follow, we follow, we give thee chase.
Follow me, follow.
We come, we come. [*Exeunt Chor.*

Ach. I could not bear that thou shouldst strain thy hands
Dragging those branches up the sunny hill;
Nor for a thousand honours thou shouldst do me,
Making me here thy queen, would I consent
To lose thy company, even for an hour.
See, while the maids warm in their busy play,
We may enjoy in quiet the sweet air,
And thro' the quivering golden green look up
To the deep sky, and have high thoughts as idle
And bright, as are the small white clouds becalmed
In disappointed voyage to the noon:
There is no better pastime.

Deid. I will sit with thee

In idleness, while idleness can please.

Ach. It is not idleness to steep the soul
In nature's beauty: rather every day
We are idle letting beauteous things go by
Unheld, or scarce perceived. We cannot dream
Too deeply, nor o'erprize the mood of love,
When it comes on us strongly, and the hour
Is ripe for thought.

Deid. I have a thought, a dream;
If thou canst keep it secret.

Ach. I am thy slave.

Deid. Suppose—'tis more than that, yet I'll but say
Suppose—we played this game of Amazons
In earnest. What an isle this Scyros were;
Rich and wellplanted, and its rocky coast
Easy of defence: the women now upon it
Could hold it. Nay, I have often thought it out:
The king my sire is threescore years and more,
And hath no heir: suppose that when he dies,—
The gods defer it long, but when he dies,
If thou and I should plan to seize this isle,
Drive out the men, and rule it for our own . . .
Wouldst thou work with me, Pyrrha, the thing could be.
Why shouldst thou smile? I do not say that I
Would rate my strength with men; but on the farms
Women are thicker sinewed; and in thee

I see what all might be. I am sure for speed
No man could match thee, and thou hast an arm
To tug an oar or hurl the heaviest spear,
Or wrestle with the best. Why dost thou smile?
Ach. When thou art queen, I'll be thy general.
Deid. That was my thought. What dost thou think?
Ach. I think
That Fate hath marked me for a general.
Deid. Nay, but I jest not.
Ach. Then shall I forecast
And weigh impediments against thee? as men
Will in like case, who think no scheme mature
Till counsel hath forestalled all obstacles.
Deid. If thou canst think of any.
Ach. First is this,
Whence shall we get our subjects when our isle
Is peopled but by women?
Deid. Fairly asked,
Had I not thought of it. We shall import them
From other isles. Girl children everywhere
Are held of small account: these we will buy,
Bartering for them our fruits and tapestries,
And chiefly from the country whence thou comest;
For there I think the women must be taller
And stronger than with us.
Ach. And who will act

Persuader to the maidens of the isle
To banish all their lovers?
Deid. O Pyrrha, shame!
Man's love is nothing; what knowst thou of it
To magnify its folly? 'Tis a mischief
To thwart our good: therefore I banish it.
A woman's love may be as much to woman
As a man's love can be. 'Tis reasonable
This, and no dream. 'Tis my experience.
When I am with thee, Pyrrha, I want nothing.
No woman sitting by her silly lover
Could take such pleasure from his flatteries
As I from thy speech. When thou lookest on me
I am all joy; and if 'tis so with thee,
Why need we argue? Tell me, when I am with thee
Dost thou lack aught, or wish I were a man?
Ach. In truth nay, but . . .
Deid. A wretched but: I know
What that would say; this thing cannot be done
Because 'twas never done. But that's with me
The reason why it should be done.
Ach. I see.
Yet novelty hath no wear. Remember too
We must grow old. The spirit of such adventure
Tires as the body ages.
Deid. For that I think

I make the best provision. Nay, I have seen
Full many an old dame left in last neglect,
Whose keen gray eye, peaked face, and silver hair
Were god-like set beneath a helm of brass.

Ach. Here be the maids: ask them their mind at once.

Deid. Nay, for the world no word.

Enter Chorus, with flowers.

Why run they breathlessly in merry fear?
What have ye seen? What now?

Ch. The king. Fly, fly!

Ach. Why should we fly the king?

Ch. A man is with him, and they come this way.

Deid. Who is it?

Ch. Nay, we know not.

Deid. What hath happed?

Ch. We went forth as ye bade, and all together
Ran down the hill, the straightest way we might,
Into the copse, and lo! 'twas as thou saidst;
The hazels are all felled, but on the ground,
That 'neath the straight trunks of the airy trees
Lies in the spotted sunlight, are upsprung
Countless anemones, white, red, and blue,
In the bright glade. Forgetting why we came,
We fell to gathering these. I chose the blue,

As ye may see, loving blue blossoms best,
That are content with heaven.
2nd Speaker. And I the red,
Love's passionate colour; and the love in these
Is mixed with heavenly to a royal purple.
3rd. And I the white: whose praise I will not tell,
Lest it should blush.
4th. And I have mixed together
The red and white.
5th. And I the red and blue.
6th. And I the blue and white.
Deid. Well, but the matter.
What happened next, tell me?
Ch. (*1st.*) Still at this game,
Like to a hungry herd that stops and feeds,
Snatching what tempts it on, we made advance
To the entrance of the combe; and then one cried,
Look up! Look there! And from the open brow,
Whence we looked down upon the sea, we saw
A great war-ship in the harbour: and one said,
She comes from Athens; and another, nay,
Her build is Rhodian: when as there we gazed,
Counting her ports, and wondering of her name,—
We heard men's voices and beheld the king
Mounting the hill-side, with a stranger clad
In short Greek robes. Then ran we back to thee,

Ere we were seen, in haste; that we may hide,
And not be called within to attend the guests.
Deid. So did ye well, whoe'er it be, and best
If 'tis the prince of Melos, as I fear:
Who late my father said would come to woo me:
But he must find me first. [*Going.*
Ach. I'll be thine eyes
And take his measure. Let me lurk behind,
I'll learn his height, the colour of his beard,
And bring thee word.
Deid. I pray, no beards for me.
Those that love beards remain. The rest with me.
Follow me, follow: I lead the race. [*Exit.*
Ch. Follow, we follow. We give thee chase—
Follow me, follow—
—We come, we come. [*Exeunt Chor.*

Ach. I wish I had had Apollo for my sire;
Or that old Cheiron, when he taught me arms,
Hunting the beasts on bushy Pelion,
Had led and trained me rather, as well he knew,
In that fair park of fancy and delight,
Where but the Graces and the Muses come.
For he could sing: and oft took down at eve
From the high pillar of his rocky cave
The lyre or pipe, and whiled the darksome hours.

Which would I had learned, to touch the stops and strings,
Nor only harked thereto: for nought he sang,
Whether of gods or men, of peace or war,
Had any theme of sweetness to compare
With my new world, here, where I am king, and rule
The sweetest thing in nature. Had I skill
To give translation to my joy, I think
I could make music that should charm the world.
O Deidamia, thou Queen of my heart,
I would enchant thee and thine isle. Alas!
How wilt thou learn thou art mine? How can I tell
And with the word not lose thee? Now this suitor
Threats my betrayal . . . He comes. I'll watch. Yet not
With jealous eyes, but heedful of my fate.

[*Hides in bushes.*

Enter Lycomedes and Abas.

LYCOMEDES.

'Tis folly and impertinence. I say it
With due respect unto the prince, thy master,
Who am as much his elder as the king
His father is. He ne'er would so have wronged me,—
The mild and good Laertes.—In this isle
Think'st thou 'twere possible a man should hide,

And I not know it?

ABAS.

My Lord Ulysses, sire,
Bade me assure your majesty he came
More with the purpose to acquit your honour,—
Which suffers greatly in the common tongue,—
Than with a hope to find what he pretends
He comes to seek.

Lyc. Why should he come at all?

Ab. Taking your invitation in the sense
That I have spoken . . .

Lyc. Thinks he, if I chose
To hide the man in Scyros, that a stranger
From Ithaca could find him?

Ab. Nay . . .

Lyc. It follows
Your search can never quit my honesty,
Where I am held accomplice; but no less
Must put a slight upon my wits, implying
Me the deceived.

Ab. Your invitation, sire,
Covers that charge.

Lyc. My invitation, sir,
Was but my seal of full denial, a challenge
For honour's eye, not to be taken up.
Your master hath slipped in manners: yet fear not

But I will meet and treat him as his birth
And name require. Speak we no more of this.
What think'st thou of our isle?
Ab. The famed Ægean
Hath not a finer jewel on her breast.
Lyc. Come, come! you overpraise us: there's no need.
We Scyrians are contented.—Now we are climbed
Above the town to the east; and you may see
The western seaboard, and our other port.
The island narrows here to twenty stades,
Cut like a wasp; the shoulder where we stand
Is its best natured spot: It falls to the sun,
And at this time of the year takes not too much.
Ab. 'Tis strange how in all points the lie of the land
Is like our Ithaca, but better clothed.
Lyc. And larger, is't not?
Ab. Past comparison.—
Lyc. What navy bring ye to the war?
Ab. Ah, sire!
We have no ships to boast of—with our own
Zakynthus, Cephallenia, and the rest,
Joining their numbers, raise but ten or twelve.
Lyc. And these your prince commands?
Ab. Such as they be.
Lyc. Tidings come slowly to us here. I pray you

Tell me the latest of your preparations.
The thing must drag: there was some talk awhile
Of coldness 'twixt the chiefs: 'twould be no wonder.
They that combine upon one private grudge
May split upon another.
Ab. Still their zeal
Increases: 'tis as fire spread from a spark.
Lyc. A spark? well—Menelaus. At this time
What numbers hath he drawn, and whence?
Ab. The ships
Number above a thousand: a tenth of these
Are sent by Corinth, Sicyon and Mycenæ;
Sixty are Spartan, and king Agamemnon
Provides as many as these all told together.
Then from Ægina, Epidaurus, Argos,
And Tiryns Diomede brings eighty: Nestor
Ninety from Pylos; from Bœotia
Come eighty; Phocis and Phthiotis each
Send forty; Athens fifty; and Eubœa
Forty; from Salamis Ajax brings twelve;
Oilean Ajax with the Locrians
Forty more; from our neighbours in the west,
Dulichium and Ætolia, eighty sail;
Again as many from hundred-citied Crete
Under the king Idomeneus, and nine
From Rhodes: All these, with others that escape

My hasty summing, lie drawn up at Aulis.
'Tis such a sight as, I am bold to say,
If but your majesty could see it, would move you
To make a part of the splendour.
Lyc. Nay, I have seen them.
Ab. Your majesty hath been at Aulis?
Lyc. Nay,
Nor yet at Aulis: but the tale thou tellest
Coming unto my ears a month ago,
Some of my lords and I one idle morn
Crossed to Eubœa,—'tis a pleasure trip,
On a clear day scarce out of sight of home—
We landed 'neath Œchalia by noon,
And, crossing o'er the isle on mules, were lodged
That night at Chalcis. The next day at dawn
I played the spy. Twas such a breathless morning
When all the sound and motion of the sea
Is short and sullen, like a dreaming beast:
Or as 'twere mixed of heavier elements
Than the bright water, that obeys the wind.
Hiring a fishing-boat we bade the sailors
Row us to Aulis; when midway the straits,
The morning mist lifted, and lo, a sight
Unpicturable.—High upon our left
Where we supposed was nothing, suddenly
A tall and shadowy figure loomed: then two,

And three, and four, and more towering above us:
But whether poised upon the leaden sea
They stood, or floated in the misty air,
That baffling our best vision held entangled
The silver of the half-awakened sun,
Or whether near or far, we could not tell,
Nor what: at first I thought them rocks, but ere
That error could be told, they were upon us
Bearing down swiftly athwart our course; and all
Saw 'twas a fleet of ships, not three or four
Now, but unnumber'd: like a floating city,
If such could be, with walls and battlements
Spread on the wondering water: and now the sun
Broke thro' the haze, and from the shields outhung
Blazed back his dazzling beams, and round their prows
On the divided water played; as still
They rode the tide in silence, all their oars
Stretched out aloft, as are the balanced wings
Of storm-fowl, which returned from battling flight
Across the sea, steady their aching plumes
And skim along the shuddering cliffs at ease:
So came they gliding on the sullen plain,
Out of the dark, in silent state, by force
Yet unexpended of their nightlong speed.

Those were the Cretan ships, who when they saw us
Hailed for a pilot, and of our native sailors

Took one aboard, and dipping all their oars
Passed on, and we with them, into the bay.
Then from all round, where the dark hulls were moored
Against the shore, and from the tents above
A shout of joy went up, re-echoing
From point to point; and we too cheered and caught
The zeal of that great gathering.—Where man is met
The gods will come; or shall I say man's spirit
Hath operative faculties to mix
And make his gods at will? Howe'er that be,
Soon a swift galley shot out from the rest
To meet the comers. That was Agamemnon's,
They told me; and I doubt not he was in it,
And gave his welcome to Idomeneus,
And took him to his tent. On such a day
Our little boat rowed where we would unmarked:
We were but Chalcian pilots. So I saw
Whate'er I wished to see, and came away
Across the strait that night, and the next day
Was home by sundown.

Ab. All this could you see
Without the wish to join?

Lyc. I say not that;
For wish I did that I was young again.
Then, sir, I would have left whate'er I had,

My kingdom to another, for the pride,
Of high place in such war; now I am old.
Ab. But older men than thou have joined us, sire.
War needs experience.
Lyc. Concerning war
I am divided in opinion, Abas:
But lean to think it hath a wholesome root
Supportive to our earthly habit. I see
The noblest beasts will love to fight, and man
Is body as well as spirit: his mind that's set
In judgment o'er those twain must oft admit
The grosser part hath a preponderant claim.
But I regret this, and my discontent
Puts me this question, Shall man never come
To a better state with his desire? What think you?
What if our race yet young should with the time
Throw off the baser passions, as I find
Myself by age affected? I know not . . .
I have a little statue in my house,
Which, if you look on't long, begets belief
Of absolute perfectionment; the artist
Should have been present when man's clay was mixed.
Prometheus, or whoever 'twas that made us,
Had his head turned with natural history:
All excellent contrivance, but betraying
Commonness and complexity. Well! well!

No need of my philosophies in Scyros—
War must have motive, and the men I rule
Are simple and contented with their lot.
None in my land would wish an atom changed:
Were even Achilles here 'twould be no wonder
If he had caught our temper.

Ab. All men witness
To thy good rule, O king: but in the wars
Fame may be won.

Lyc. Nor do I ask for fame.
Come that to whom it will; to Agamemnon,
To Ajax or Ulysses or Achilles.

Ab. To Achilles no: 'tis not in the gods' grace
To succour pigritude. To him, a lad,
The prize of honour above all the Greeks
Was offered: by the poor effeminacy
With which he hath rejected it, he is judged
Meanest of all. But since we cannot win
Without him, we must have him. Little glory
To him, except to be Fate's dullest tool.

Lyc. Maybe. Now come we on. I had thought to find
My daughter and her train. I'll take thee round
Another way to the palace: thither no doubt
She is now returned. [*Exeunt.*

Enter Achilles from the bushes.

Ach. Villain, I thank the gods that sent thee hither.
But thou wast near thy death. Walk off secure,
Not knowing that I heard. *Effeminate!*
The meanest of the Greeks! were he the best,
I'd slay him in this garment. Yet he is but
A tongue to troll opinion of me, a slave,
Fetcher and carrier of others' tales, and doth
The drudgery honestly; for that I'll thank him
And profit by his slander. Ay, so I'll do—
Now in good time—I'll get me a man's dress
And meet them here, ere they suspect me :—or, stay!
I can outwit them better. I'll take a boat,
Cross o'er to Aulis, like good Lycomede,
This very night, and there to Agamemnon
Declare myself; and men shall never know
How I was hid, nor whence I came.

Enter Thetis.

Th. My son!

Ach. My goddess mother, welcome! yet I am shamed
That thou shouldst find me thus.

Th. How art thou shamed?

Ach. This dress. O thou canst help me: thou art ready
At every need. And here hath been a man

Who, thinking not I heard, spake to the king
Of thy Achilles with such scorn, that I
Should have leaped forth upon him in my rage,
And strangled him, but that he seemed to be
Another's servant.

Th. Then thou hast seen them, son?

Ach. Who are they?

Th. Those I came to warn thee of;
Ulysses and his friends. Knowst thou 'tis they
Are come unto the isle to seek thee?

Ach. Ay.
But thou art ready to outwit their wile.
As thou didst bring me hither on that night
When all thy nymphs, assembling 'neath the moon
Upon the Achæan shore, bore me away
Across the sea, even so to Aulis now
Convey me secretly, and set me there,
Ere men know whence I come.

Th. What hear I, son?
To Aulis? to thy foes?

Ach. A thousand ships
Moored idle in the bay wait but for me:
And round the shore the captains of the Greeks
Impatient in their tents but call for me.
Be they my foes to speak or wish me ill,
'Tis only that I come not. I must go.

Th. There let them tarry till the sea-worm bore
Their ships to rottenness; or, sail they forth,
Let them be butchered by the sword of Hector,
Ere thou be snared to serve their empty pride.

Ach. But louder than their need my honour calls:
Hast thou no thought of this in all thy love?

Th. Who then is honoured more or more desired
Than thou art now? but they, if once they had thee,
Would slight thee, and pretend they were the men.

Ach. But those are honoured best that hear their praise.

Th. Is not high Zeus himself, holding aloof,
Worshipped the more? Let the world say of thee,
When these have perished, that they went their way
Because the son of Thetis would not aid them.

Ach. But if 'twere said because he feared to die?

Th. Fearst thou reproach of fear that fearst not death?

Ach. I fear not, but by proof would shun reproach.

Th. Men, son, are what they are; and thou art brave.
'Tis asked of poor and questionable spirits
To prove their worth.

Ach. I prove myself a coward.

Th. How! when it needed heavenly prayers and tears,
The force of duty and a goddess' will

To keep thee back from death! when all the joys
That I have set about thee, and a love
More beautiful than Helen's cannot hold thee!
Ach. Fate, that from men hideth her pitiless face,
Offered to me this kindness, that my will
Should be of force in predetermined deeds:
Allowing me to take which life I would
Of two incomparable lots; I ever
Leaned one way, the other thou; and still at heart
I hold to my first choice.
Th. O child of man,
Though child of mine, wouldst thou know wisdom's way,
Learn it of me. If I had said to thee
Thou being a mortal shouldst love death and darkness;
For in the brief date of thy heedless term
'Tis vain to strive with evil: and since the end
Cometh the same, and at the latest cometh
So soon, that there's no difference to be told
'Twixt early and late, 'tis wisdom to despair:
Then would thy tongue have boldly answered me,
And said, Man hath his life; that it must end
Condemns it not for nought. Are rivers salt
Because they travel to the bitter sea?
Is the day dark because the gorgeous west
Must fade in gloom, when the ungazeable sun

Is fallen beneath the waves? Or hath the spring
No charm in her pavilions, are her floors
Not starred, for that we see her birth is slow
Of niggard winter, and her blossoms smirched
By summer's tyranny? Hadst thou said this,
And that Earth's changeful pride, the life of man,
Is exquisite in such a quality
To make the high gods envious could they guess:
Then had I found no answer: but when I
Told thee of joy, and set thee in the midst,
That thou shouldst argue with me that 'tis best
To die at once, and for an empty name
Pass to the trivial shades; then must I fear
I have as thankless and unwise a son,
As disobedient.—Yet when first I taught thee
Thou gav'st me promise to be wise.
Ach. But never
Wilt thou then free me from my promise given?
Th. Not to thy hurt.
Ach. See now what shame I bear!
Th. Why make so much of shame? If thou despise
The pleasure of the earth, why not the shame?
Ach. I wrong, too, this old king.
Th. His daughter more,
If thou desert her.
Ach. But 'twould hurt her less

To lose me now than know me when disgraced.

Th. I plead not in her name, nor charge thee, son,
With loving her in my contempt. A dream
Of mortal fancy or honour may becloud
Thy mind awhile, but ne'er canst thou forget
Thy bond to me; the care that never left thee
Till thou wert out of hand; the love that dared
To send thee from my sight when thou wast able,
And to strange lands; my secret visitings
There, and revisitings; the dreams I sent thee,
Warnings of ill, and ecstasies of pride;
The thousand miracles I wrought to save thee,
And guard thee to thy prime;—and now men say
Thou art the first of the Greeks: their homaged kings
The gods condemn to death if thou withhold
Thy single arm. Why so? What hast thou done?
Where have men seen thee? Hast thou ruled like Nestor?
Conquered like Agamemnon, fought like Ajax?
What is thy prowess, what thy skill but this,
That thou art son of Thetis? Disobey not,
Nor question now my bidding. Must I kneel,
Embrace thy knees, or melt before thy face
In supplicating tears? O if thy birth
Did cost the tenderest tears that god e'er shed,
Make not those bitter drops to have flowed in vain.
Whate'er fate portion thee my joy is this—

That thou dost love me. Dost thou cease to love,
I am most miserable.
Ach. O fear not that,
Mother and goddess! Pardon me, weep not.
Let all men curse me, be my name abhorred,
Rather than thou be grieved. 'Twas anger moved me:
I will forget this, and obey thee. Say
What I must do, how best avoid these men:
And how refuse their call if I be found.
Th. Kiss me, my son. By the gods' life, I love thee:
My grief is to deny thee. But there's need
Of counsel, for the day is critical
And glides apace. And first if they should find thee,
Then 'tis thy fate to go: I cannot stay thee.
And since to bear thee hence were sure betrayal,
I urge thee to be true to thy disguise.
And better to escape thy foes, learn now
Whom most to dread. Of all the Argives shun
Ulysses; come not near him in the halls;
And should he speak to thee, answer no word.
Him thou wilt know by his preëminence:
In person he is beardless yet, and smooth
Of face and tongue, alluring, gentle in voice
But sturdy of body, and 'neath his helm his locks
O'er a wide brow and restless eye curl forth
In ruddy brown; nor less for his attire

Notable is he, wearing the best of all,
His linen broidered, and broad jewels to hold
A robe of gray and purple.
Ach. He shall not spy me.
But if by any warning from the gods
He know and call to me, how then to escape
The shame of this Ionian skirt?
Th. That chance
I can provide for, and shall give thee now
A magic garment fitting to thy body,
Which worn beneath thy robe will seem as weft
Of linen thread, but if it meet the light
'Twill be a gilded armour, and serve well
In proof as show. Come, I will set it on thee.
[*Exeunt.*

Enter Deidamia and Chorus.

Deid. The ground is clear, we have deceived them mightily,
Running around.
Ch. Where is our queen?
(2) Not here.
Deid. I'll call her. Pyrrha!—Call all together.
Ch. Pyrrha!
Deid. She will come presently.—Did ye not mark
How resonant this glade is? that our voices
Neither return nor fly, but stay about us?

It is the trunks of the trees that cage the sound;
As in an open temple, where the pillars
Enrich the music. In my father's hall
The echo of each note burdens the next.
'Twould be well done to cut a theatre
Deep in some wooded dale. Till Pyrrha come,
Alexia, sing thou here.

Ch. What shall I sing?

Deid. There is a Lydian chant I call to mind
In honour of music-makers: it beginneth
With praise of the soft spring, and heavenly love—
'Twill suit our mood, if thou remember it.

Chorus.

The earth loveth the spring,
Nor of her coming despaireth,
Withheld by nightly sting,
Snow, and icy fling,
The snarl of the North:
But nevertheless she prepareth
And setteth in order her nurselings to bring them forth,
The jewels of her delight,
What shall be blue, what yellow or white;
What softest above the rest,
The primrose, that loveth best
Woodland skirts and the copses shorn.

2.

And on the day of relenting she suddenly weareth
Her budding crowns. O then, in the early morn,
Is any song that compareth
With the gaiety of birds, that thrill the gladdened air
In inexhaustible chorus
To awake the sons of the soil
With music more than in brilliant halls sonorous
(—It cannot compare—)
Is fed to the ears of kings
From the reeds and hirèd strings?
For love maketh them glad;
And if a soul be sad,
Or a heart oracle dumb,
Here may it taste the promise of joy to come.

3.

For the Earth knoweth the love which made her,
The omnipotent one desire,
Which burns at her heart like fire,
And hath in gladness arrayed her.
And man with the Maker shareth,
Him also to rival throughout the lands,
To make a work with his hands
And have his children adore it:

The Creator smileth on him who is wise and dareth
In understanding with pride:
For God, where'er he hath builded, dwelleth wide,—
And he careth,—
To set a task to the smallest atom,
The law-abiding grains,
That hearken each and rejoice:
For he guideth the world as a horse with reins;
It obeyeth his voice,
And lo! he hath set a beautiful end before it:

4.

Whereto it leapeth and striveth continually,
And pitieth nought, nor spareth:
The mother's wail for her children slain,
The stain of disease,
The darts of pain,
The waste of the fruits of trees,
The slaughter of cattle,
Unbrotherly lust, the war
Of hunger, blood, and the yells of battle,
It heedeth no more
Than a carver regardeth the wood that he cutteth away:
The grainèd shavings fall at his feet,
But that which his tool hath spared shall stand
For men to praise the work of his hand;

For he cutteth so far, and there it lay,
And his work is complete.

5.

But I will praise 'mong men the masters of mind
In music and song,
Who follow the love of God to bless their kind:
And I pray they find
A marriage of mirth—
And a life long
With the gaiety of the Earth.

Ch. There stands an old man down beneath the bank,
Gazing, and beckoning to us.
Deid. He is a stranger,
That burdened with some package to the palace
Hath missed his way about, and fears to intrude.
Go some and show him. [*Some run out.*
Meanwhile what do we?
We have no sport when Pyrrha is away.
Our game is broken. Come, a thought, a thought!
Hath none a thought?
Ch. We have never built the bower.
Deid. Ye idled gathering flowers. Now 'tis too late.
Ch. Let us play ball.
Deid. The sun is still so high.
I shall go feed my doves.

(*Re-enter one of Chorus.*)

Ch. The old man saith
That he is a pedlar, and hath wares to sell
If he may show them. Shall he come?
Deid. Now Hermes,
The father of device and jugglery,
Be thanked for this; 'tis he hath sent him.—Call him.
His tales may be good hearing, tho' his pack
Repay not search. But be advised: beware,
Lest he bear off more than he bring: these fellows
Have fingers to unclasp a brooch or pin
While the eye winks that watches. There was one
Who as he ran a race would steal the shoes
Of any that ran with him. The prince of all
Was merry Autolycus.

Enter, with those who had gone out, Ulysses as a pedlar.

Good day, old man.
Come, let us see thy wares.
Ul. I have no breath left,
Wherewith to thank you, ladies; the little hill
Has ta'en it from me.
Deid. Rest awhile, and tell us
Whence thou art come.
Ul. In a Greek ship this morn.

I pray you, that I lack not courtesy,
Art thou the princess of this isle?
Deid. I am.
Ul. My true and humble service to your highness.
Deid. In turn say who art thou, and whence thy ship.
Ul. Fair, honoured daughter of a famous king,
I have no story worthy of thine ear,
Being but a poor artificer of Smyrna,
Where many years I wrought, and ye shall see
Not without skill, in silver and in gold.
But happiness hath wrecked me, and I say
'Tis ill to marry young; for from that joy
I gat a son, who as the time went on,
Grew to be old and gray and wise as I;
And bettering much the art which I had taught him
Longed to be master in my place, for which
He grew unkind, and his sons hated me:
And when one day he wished me dead, I feared
Lest I should kill myself; and so that night
I made me up a pack of little things
He should not grieve for, and took ship for Greece.
There have I trafficked, lady, a year and more,
And kept myself alive hawking small ware
From place to place, and on occasion found
A market for my jewels, and be come here
Making the round of the isles in any ship

That chances: and this last I came aboard
At Andros, where I was: but whence she hailed
I have even forgot. May it please thee see my wares?
Deid. Thy tale is very sad. I am sorry for thee.
Why would thy son, being as thou sayst so skilled,
Not ply his trade apart?
Ul. My house in Smyrna
Was head of all the goldsmiths: 'twas for that,
Lady, he envied me. See now my wares.
Deid. What beauteous work! I'm glad thou'rt come. I'll buy
A trinket for myself, and let my maids
Choose each what she may fancy. Hear ye, girls?
I'll make a gift to each.
Ch. O thanks.—To all?—
And may we choose?
Deid. Yes.
Ch. Anything we please?
Deid. Why, that is choosing.
Ch. O we thank thee.
Ul. Now
I see, princess, thou'rt of a bounteous blood,
To make all round thee happy.
Deid. What is this brooch?
Ul. If for thyself thou fancy a brooch, I'll show thee
The best jewel in my box, and not be shamed

To say I have no better.
Ch. See, oh, see!
What lovely things!—A rare old man!
Ul. Here 'tis.
What thinkest thou?
Deid. Is't not a ruby?
Ul. And fine!
Deid. I think thy son will have missed this.
Ul. Nay, lady:
I had it of a sailor, who, poor fool,
Knew not its worth; and thou mayst buy it of me
For half its value.
Deid. May I take these two
To view them nearly?
Ul. All take as ye will.
Ye do me honour, ladies.
Deid. Hear ye, girls,
Make each her choice. I will o'erlook your taste
When all is done.
Ul. Come, buy my wares: come buy.
Come, come buy; I've wares for all,
Were ye each and all princesses.
Clasps and brooches, large and small,
Handy for holding your flowing dresses.
Ch. What is this little box for?
Ul. Open it.

Ch. What is this vial?

Ul. Smell it. Buy, come buy!
Charms for lovers, charms to break,
Charms to bind them to you wholly.
Medicines fit for every ache,
Fever and fanciful melancholy.

Ch. O smell this scent.—Here be fine pins.—See this!

Ul. (*aside*). I spy none here to match my notion yet.

Ch. I have found amber beads.—What is it is tied
In little packets?

Ul. Toilet secrets those,
Perfumes, and rare cosmetics 'gainst decay.

Deid. (*to one apart*). Alexia, see. I will buy this for Pyrrha.
'Tis pity she is not here. What thinkest thou of it?
He said it was his best. This other one
I'll give to thee if thou find nothing better.
Go see. I will seek Pyrrha. [*Exit.*

Ul. Buy, come buy!
Tassels, fringes, silken strings,
Girdles, ties, and Asian pockets,
Armlets, necklaces and rings,
Images, amulets, lovers' lockets.

Ch. Pray, what are these, good man?

Ul. Of soft doe-skin

These gilded thongs are made for dancers' wear,
To tie their sandals.
Ch. And is this a pin,
This golden grasshopper?
Ul. Ay, for the hair.
The Athenian ladies use nought else. See here
This little cup.
Ch. Didst thou make that?
Ul. Nay, ladies.
Ch. Show us some work of thine which thou didst make
Thy very self.
Ul. See then this silver snake.
Fear not. Come near and mark him well: my trade is,
Or was, I should say, in such nice devices.
'Twill coil and curl, uncoil, dart and recoil. [*Showing.*

The Chorus crowd about him, when enter unperceived by him Achilles and Deidamia.

Deid. Come, come, there never hath been one like him here.
Hark! see the girls: they crowd and chatter round
As greedily as birds being fed. I bade them choose
Each one a present, but I took the best,
This ruby brooch. Look at it: 'tis for thee.
Let me now put it on thee. I'll unclasp

Thy robe and set it in the place of the other.

Ach. Nay, Deidamia, unfasten not my robe!

Deid. Why, 'twould not matter if he looked this way.

Ach. Nay, prithee.—

Deid. Well, thou must take my gift.

Ach. Then must I give thee somewhat in return.

Deid. But 'tis my will to-day to give to all.

Ach. Then let me take my choice, some smaller thing.

Deid. Come then ere all is ransacked.

Ach. (*aside*). I scarce escaped
The uncovering of my magic coat.—[*They go to Ulysses.*

Ul. Come buy,
Needles for your broideries rare,
Dainty bodkins silver-hafted.
Pins to fix your plaited hair,
Ivory-headed and golden-shafted.

Ach. What hast thou in thy pack for me, old man?

Ul. There's nought but trifles left me, lady, now,
As dice and dolls; the very dregs of the box.

Deid. Athenian owls. And who's this red-baked lady
Clothed in a net?

Ul. Princess, 'tis Britomartis,
The Cretan goddess worshipped at Ægina.

Deid. This little serpent too?

Ul. Nothing to thee:

But the Erechtheidæ use to fasten such
About their children's necks. Nay, not a babe
Is born but they must don him one of these,
Or ever he be swaddled or have suck.

Deid. This blinking pygmy here, with a man's body
And a dog's head, squatting upon a button . . .
What's he?

Ul. 'Tis an Egyptian charm, to ban
The evil spirits bred of Nilus' slime.

Deid. And this?

Ul. That. See, 'tis a Medusa, lady,
Cut in an oyster-shell, with flaming snakes.

Deid. These are all nothings. Thou must have the brooch.
See, now 'tis thine; thou hast it. (*Pins it upon Achilles' robe.*) (*To Ul.*) What is its price?
(*To Ach.*) Nay, be content.

Ul. To thee I'll sell it, lady,
For a tenfold weight of gold.

Ach. Oh! 'tis too much.
Spend not such store on me. And for the ruby,
'Tis dark and small.

Ul. The purple is its merit:
Were it three times the size and half the tint,
'Twere of slight cost.

Ach. So might I like it better.

And that—what's that, which thou dost put aside?
Is that a toy?

Ul. Nay, lady; that is no toy.
'Tis a sharp sword. But I will show it thee
For its strange quality: the which methinks
Might pass for magic, were't not that an Arian,
Late come to Sardis, knows the art to make it.
Tho' wrought of iron, look ye, 'tis blue as flint,
And if I bend it, it springs back like a bow:
'Tis sharper too than flint; but the edge is straight,
And will not chip. Nay, touch it not; have care!

Ach. Pray, let me see it, and take it in my hand.
[*Takes it and comes to front.*

Ul. (*aside*). This should be he.

Ach. (*aside*). My arm writhes at the touch.

Ul. There is a hunter, with his game, a lion,
Inlaid upon it: and on the other side
Two men that fight to death.

Ach. 'Tis light in the hand.

Deid. (*to Ach.*). Canst thou imagine any use for this?

Ach. (*to Deid.*). Not when thy father dies?

Ul. Ladies, have care.
For if the sword should wound you, I were blamed.

Ach. Why, thinkest thou 'tis only bearded men
Can wield a sword? The queen of the Amazons
Could teach thee something maugre thy white hair.

Ul. (*aside*). The game hath run into the snare;
He is mine.

Ach. See, Deidamia, here's my choice; buy this
If thou wilt give me something; thou dost like
The ruby; if thou wilt let me give thee that,
Thou in return buy me this little sword.

Deid. Such presents are ill-omened, and 'tis said
Will shrewdly cut in twain the love they pledge.

Ach. But we may make a bond of this divider.

Deid. Wilt thou in earnest take it for thy choice?

Ach. If thou wert late in earnest, thou couldst do
No better than arm all thy girls with these.
The weapon wins the battle, and I think
With such advantage women might be feared.
(*To Ul.*) Old man, I like thy blade; and I will have it.
I see 'twould thrust well: tell me if 'tis mettle
To give a stroke. Suppose I were thy foe,
And standing o'er thee thus to cut thee down
Should choose to cleave thy pate. Would this sword
do it?

Ul. (*aside*). He knows me!

[*Pulling off his beard and head-dress and leaping up.*

Achilles!

Deid. and Ch. Help! help! treachery!

[*They fly.*

Diomede comes out of bushes where he stands unseen by Achilles.

Ach. Beardless—and smooth of face as tongue: In voice
Gentle, but sturdy of body: ruddy locks,
And restless eye . . Ulysses!

Ul. Thou hast it.

Ach. I knew that thou wert here, but looked to meet thee
Without disguises, as an honest man.

Ul. Thou needest a mirror, lady, for thyself.

Ach. (*suddenly casts off his long robe and appears in shining armour, still holding the sword*).
Behold! . . . . Be thou my mirror!

Ul. If I be not,
'Tis shame to thee, the cause of my disguise.

Ach. I own thee not. I knew thee for a prince,
But seeing thee so vilely disfigured . . .

Ul. Stay!
We both have used disguise: I call for judgment
Upon the motive. Mine I donned for valour,
And care for thy renown; thine was for fear.

Ach. Fear! By the gods: take up thy beard again,
And thy mock dotage shield thee.

Ul. Nay, Achilles;
If I spake wrong I will recall the word.

Ach. Thou didst unutterably lie. Recall it.

Ul. Wilt thou then sail to Aulis in my ship?

Ach. I can sail thither and not sail with thee.

Ul. But wilt thou come?

Ach. I answer not to thee
Because thou questionest me: but since I know
What will be, and hear thee in ignorance
Slander fair names, I tell thee that Achilles
Will come to Aulis.

Ul. Wherefore now so long
Hast thou denied thyself to thy renown?

Ach. Thou saidst for fear; nor hast recalled the word.

Ul. 'Twas first thy taunt which drew my mind from me:
But, if it wrong thee, I recall the word.

Ach. I think thou hast judged me by thyself, Ulysses.
When thou wast summoned to the war,—who wert
Not free to choose as I, but bound by oath
To Menelaus to help him,—what didst thou?
Why thou didst feign; and looking for disguise
Thy wit persuaded thee that they who knew thee
Would never deem that thou wouldst willingly
Make mock of that: so thou didst put on madness,
Babbling and scrabbling even before thy friends:
And hadst been slavering on thy native rocks

Unto this day, had not one fellow there
Lightly unravelled thee, and in the furrow,
Which thou with dumb delusion, morn and eve,
Didst plough in the sea sand (that was thy trick),
He placed thy new-born babe. That thou brok'st down
Then in thine acting, that thou drav'st not on
The share thro' thine own flesh, is the best praise
I have to give thee.

Ul. Distinguish! if I feigned,
'Twas that I had a child and wife, whose ties
Of tenderness I am not ashamed to own.

Ach. I say thou wentest not unto this war
But by compulsion, thou, that chargest me
With fear. 'Tis thou that art the stay-at-home,
Not I; my heart was ever for the war,
And 'gainst my will I have been withheld: that thou
Mistakest in this my duty for my leaning,
Is more impeachment of thy boasted wits,
Than was thy empty husbandry. Are not
The Argive chiefs more subject, one and all,
To this reproach of fear? Why need they me
A boy of sixteen years to lead them on?
Did they lack ships or men, what are my people
In number? who am I in strength? what rank
Have I in Hellas? Where's the burly Ajax?
Where is the son of Herakles? and Nestor

The aged? Teucer and Idomeneus?
Menestheus, Menelaus? and not least
Where's Diomede?
Dio. (*coming forward*). By chance he's here.
Ach. Ah! now
I hear a soldier's voice. Brave Diomede,
I give thee welcome, tho' thou comest behind.
Dio. Hail, son of Thetis, champion of the Greeks!
Ach. Anon, anon. What dost thou here? Wert thou
Sat in an ambush or arrived by chance,
As thou didst say?
Dio. By heaven I cannot tell.
I serve Ulysses, and he serves the gods:
If thou'rt displeased with them, gibe not at me.
Ach. I see the plan—The pedlar here in front,
The lion behind. And so ye thought to seize me.
Ul. Have we not done it?
Ach. Nay.
Ul. Thou canst not scape.
Ach. I give that back to thee.
Ul. What wilt thou now?
Ach. Diomede and I have swords: thou mayst stand by
Until 'tis time thou show me how to escape.
I'll drive you to your ship.

Ul. (*aside to Dio.*).
Answer him not. He cannot leave the isle:
When the king learns of our discovery
He must deliver him up. Let's to the palace.
Dio. (*to Ul.*). Nay, I must speak—
Ul. Thou wilt but anger him.
He will yield better if we cross him not.
Dio. (*to Ach.*). Brave son of Thetis, I'd not yield to thee
In any trial of strength, tho' thou be clad
In heavenly armour; but I came not here
To fight, and least with thee: put up thy sword.
And since I heard thee say thou wilt to Aulis,
Our mission is accomplished, nought remains
But to renounce our acting, and atone
For what we have ventured. First I speak thee free
To follow thine own way. Unless the king
Or other here be in thy secrecy,
None know but we, nor shall know: be it thy will,
My lips are sealed, and in whatever else
Thou wilt command me, I shall be glad to obey.
Ach. Thank thee, good Diomede. What saith Ulysses?
Ul. I'll do whate'er will knit thee to our cause.
(*Aside.*) Yet shall men hear I found thee.
Ach. Return then to your ship; and when Ulysses

Is there restored proceed ye to the court.
But what in the surprise and consequence
Of my discovery to the king, as well
As to some others may arise, I know not;
Nor can instruct your good behaviours further.
Time grants me but short counsel for myself.
Ul. We too should study how to meet the king.
Ach. Stay yet, Ulysses. Thou hast parted here
With goods appraised to them that meant to buy.
I have a full purse with me. Be content,
Take it. I'd give as much for the little sword.
Now let me do this favour to the ladies.
Ul. (*taking*). 'Tis fit, and fairly done. I did not think
To go off robbed. The sword is worth the gold.
We part in honest dealing. Fare thee well.
Dio. (*aside*). Thrashed like a witless cur!
(*To Ach.*) Farewell, Achilles.
An hour hence we will meet thee at the palace.
[*Exeunt Ul. and Dio.*

Ach. In spite of warning taken in a silly trap,
By the common plotter! Thus to be known Achilles—
To have my wish forced on me against my will
Hath rudely cleared my sight. Where lies the gain?
The dancing ship on which I sailed is wrecked
On an unlovely shore, and I must climb

Out of the wreck upon a loveless shore,
Saving what best I love. 'Tis so. I see
I shall command these men, and in their service
Find little solace. I have a harder task
Than chieftainship, and how to wear my arms
With as much nature as yon girlish robe:
To pass from that to this without reproach
Of honour, and beneath my breastplate keep
With the high generalship of all the Greeks
My tenderest love. 'Tis now to unmask that,
And hold uninjured. I'll make no excuse
To the old king but my necessity,
And boldly appease him. Here by chance he comes.

Enter hurriedly Lycomedes and Abas.

Lyc. Was it not here, they said?
An insolent ruffian: Let me come across him!
By heav'n, still here! And armed from head to foot!
(*To Ach.*) Young man,—as now thou'lt not deny to be—
Thou'st done—ay, tho' thou seem of princely make—
Dishonour and offence to me the king
In venturing here to parley with the princess
In mock disguise, for whatsoever cause,
Strangely put on and suddenly cast off,
I am amazed to think. I bid thee tell me
What was thy purpose hither.

Ach. O honoured king,
Tho' I came here disguised I am not he
Thou thinkest.
Lyc. Nay I think not who thou art.
All wonders that I have seen are lost in thee.
Ach. Thou takest me for Ulysses.
Lyc. Nay, not I.
Ach. I am Achilles, sire, the son of Thetis.
Lyc. Achilles! Ah! Thou sayst at least a name
That fits thy starlike presence, my rebuke
Not knowing who thou wert. But now I see thee
I need no witness, and forget my wonder
Wherefore the Argives tarry on the shore
And the gods speak thy praise. Welcome then hither,
Achilles, son of Thetis; welcome hither!
And be I first to honour thee, who was
Most blamèd in thine absence.
Ach. Gracious sire,
Thy welcome is all kingly, if it bear
Forgiveness of offence.
Lyc. To speak of that,
Another might have wronged me, but not thou.
Tho' much I crave to learn both how and why
Thou camest hither. Was't in the Argive ship?
Ach. Nay, king, I came not in the Argive ship:
Nor am I that false trespasser thou seekest.

Lyc. Whether then hast thou mounted from the deep,
Where the sea nymphs till now have loved and held thee
From men's desire; or whether from the sky
Hath some god wrapt thee in a morning cloud,
And laid thee with the sunlight on this isle,
Where they that seek should find thee?
Ach. A god it was
Brought me, but not to-day: seven times the moon
Hath lost her lamp with loitering, since the night
She shone upon my passage; and so long
I have served thee in disguise, and won thy love.
Lyc. So long hast thou been here! And I unknowing
Have pledged my kingly oath—The gods forbid—
Ach. Yet was I here because a goddess bade.
Lyc. Have I then ever seen thee?
Ach. Every hour
Thou hast seen me, and sheltered me beneath thy roof.
But since thou knewest me not, thy royal word
Was hurt not by denial.
Lyc. Who wert thou? Say.
Ach. I was called Pyrrha.
Lyc. O shame.
Ach. Yet hearken, sire!
Lyc. Wast thou the close attendant of my daughter,
Her favoured comrade, and she held it hid

'Neath a familiar countenance before me,
So false unto her modesty and me?
Alas! alas!

Ach. O sire, she hath known me but as thou, and loved
Not knowing whom.

Lyc. Thou sayst she hath not known?

Ach. For 'twas a goddess framed me this disguise.

Lyc. And never guessed?

Ach. Nay, sire. Nor blame the goddess
Whom I obeyed: nor where I have done no wrong,
Make my necessity a crime against thee.

Lyc. Can I believe?

Ach. 'Tis true I have loved her, sire:
And by strange wooing if I have won her love,
And now in the discovery can but offer
A soldier's lot,—she is free to choose: but thee
First I implore, be gracious to my suit,
Nor scorn me for thy son.

Lyc. My son! Achilles!
This day shall be the feast-day of my year,
Tho' I be made to all men a rebuke
For being thy shelter, when I swore to all
Thou wert not here. Now I rejoice thou wert.
Come to my palace as thyself: be now
My guest in earnest: we will seal at once

This happy contract.

Ach. Let me first be known
Unto the princess and bespeak her will.

Lyc. She is thine, I say she is thine. Stay yet; that pedlar,
Was he Ulysses?

Ach. So he stole upon us;
And when I bought this sword he marked me out.

Lyc. I cannot brook his mastery in deceit.
Where is he now?

Ach. I sent him to the ship, 1290
To find a fit apparel for thy sight.

Lyc. Would I had caught him in his mean disguise!

Ach. So mayst thou yet. Come with me the short way
And we will intercept him.

Lyc. Abas, follow.
Thou too hast played a part I cannot like.

Ab. My liege, I have but unwittingly obeyed.
I have no higher trust.

Lyc. Now obey me. [*Exeunt.*

Enter Deidamia and Chorus.

Deid. Pyrrha, where art thou, Pyrrha?

Ch. She turned not back.—
They are not here.—She would not fly.—

Deid. Pyrrha, Pyrrha!

Ch. She hath driven the ugly pedlar and his pack
Home to his ship—would we had all been by!
Would we had joined the chase!

Deid. He was no pedlar: I could see his face
When he pulled off his beard.

Ch. There as she stood,
Waving the sword, I feared
To see a mortal stroke—
He hath fled into the wood—
Had he no sword too, did none spy,
Beneath his ragged cloke?

Deid. Alas, alas!

Ch. What hast thou found?

Deid. Woe, woe! alas, alas!
Pyrrha's robe torn, and trampled on the ground.
See! see! O misery!

Ch. 'Tis hers—'tis true—we see.

Deid. Misery, misery! help who can.

Ch. I have no help to give.—
I have no word to say.

Deid. Gods! do I live
To see this woe? The man
Like some wild beast hath dragged her body away,
And left her robe. Ah, see the gift she spurned,
My ruby jewel to my hand returned;

When forcing my accord
She chose the fatal sword.
The fool hath quite mistook her play.
Ch. He will have harmed her, if she be not slain.
Ah, Pyrrha, Pyrrha!
Why ran we away?
Deid. Why stand we here?
To the rescue: follow me.
Ch. Whither—our cries are vain.
Maybe she lieth now close by
And hears but cannot make reply.
'Tis told how men have bound
The mouths of them they bore away,
Lest by their cry
They should be found.—
Spread our company into the woods around,
And shouting as we go keep within hail.—
Or banding in parties search the paths about:
If many together shout
The sound is of more avail.
Once more, together call her name once more.
(*Calling.*) Pyrrha—Pyrrha!
Thetis (*within*). Ha!
Deid. An answer. Heard ye not?
Ch. 'Twas but the nymph, that from her hidden grot
Mocks men with the repeated syllables

Of their own voice, and nothing tells.
Such sound the answer bore.

Deid. Nay, nay.
Hark, for if 'twere but echo as ye say
'Twill answer if I call again.
(*Calls.*) Pyrrha, come! Pyrrha, come!

Thetis (*within*). I come, I come.

Deid. Heard ye not then?

Ch. I heard the selfsame sound.

Deid. 'Twas Pyrrha. Why she is found.
I know her voice. I hear her footing stir.

Ch. True, some one comes.

Deid. 'Tis she.

Enter Thetis.

Pyrrha! O joy.

Th. Why call ye her?

Deid. Pyrrha! Nay.
And yet so like. Alas, beseech thee, lady
Or goddess, for I think that such thou art,
Who answering from the wood our sorrowing call
Now to our sight appearest,—hast thou regard
For her, whom thou so much resemblest, speak
And tell us of thy pity if yet she lives
Safe and unhurt, whom we have lost and mourn.

Th. 'Tis vain to weep her, as 'twere vain to seek.
Whom think ye that ye have lost?

Deid. Pyrrha, my Pyrrha.
As late we all fled frighted by a man,
Who stole on us disguised, she stayed behind:
For when we were got safe, she was not with us.
So we returned to seek her; but alas!
Our fear is turned to terror. Lady, see!
This is her garment trampled on the ground.
Th. And so ye have found her. There was never more
Of her ye have callèd Pyrrha than that robe.
The golden-headed maiden, the enchantress,
And laughter-loving idol of your hearts
Had in your empty thought her only being.
When ye have played with her, chosen her for queen,
And leader of your games, or when ye have sat
Rapt by the music of her voice, that sang
Heroic songs and histories of the gods,
Or at brisk morn, or long-delaying eve,
Have paced the shores of sunlight hand in hand,
'Twas but a robe ye held: ye were deceived;
There was no Pyrrha.
Ch. What strange speech is this?
Was there no Pyrrha? What shall we believe!
Deid. Lady, thy speech troubles mine ear in vain.
Th. 'Tis then thine ear is vain; and not my speech.
Deid. My ears and eyes and hands have I believed,

But not thy words. A moment since I held her.
What wilt thou say?

Th. That eyes and hands and ears
Deceived thy trust, but now thou hearest truth.

Deid. Have we then dreamed, deluded by a shade
Fashioned of air or cloud, and as it seems
Made in thy likeness, or hath some god chosen
To dwell awhile with us in privity
And mutual share of all our petty deeds?
Say what thy dark words hint and who thou art.

Th. I Thetis am, daughter of that old god,
Whose wisdom buried in the deep hath made
The unfathomed water solemn, and I rule
The ocean-nymphs, who for their pastime play
In the blue glooms, and darting here and there
Checquer the dark and widespread melancholy
With everlasting laughter and bright smiles.
Of me thou hast heard, and of my son Achilles,
By prescient fame renowned first of the Greeks:
He is on this island: for 'twas here I set him
To hide him from his foes, and he was safe
Till thou betray'dst him—for unwittingly
That hast thou done to-day. The seeming pedlar,
To whom thou leddest Pyrrha, was Ulysses,
Who spied to find Achilles, and thro' thee
Found him, alas! Thy Pyrrha was Achilles.

Chorus.

O daughter of Nereus old,
Queen of the nymphs that swim
By day in gleams of gold,
By night in the silver dim,
Forgive in pity, we pray,
Forgive the ill we have done.
Why didst thou hide this thing from us?
For if we had known thy son
We had guarded him well to-day,
Nor ever betrayed him thus.

For though we may not ride
Thy tall sea-horses nor play
In the rainbow-tinted spray,
Nor dive down under the tide
To the secret caves of the main,
Among thy laughing train;
Yet had we served thee well as they,
Had we thy secret shared:
Nor ever had lost from garden and hall
Pyrrha the golden-haired,
Pyrrha beloved of all.

Th. (*to Deid.*). Dost thou say nought?
Deid. Alas, alas! my Pyrrha.
Th. Art thou lamenting still to have lost thy maid?

Deid. I need no tongue to cry my shame; and yet
Thy mockery doth not grieve me like my loss.
Th. I came not here to mock thee, and forbid
Thy grief, that doth dishonour to my son.
Deid. Nay, nay, that word is mine: speak it no more.
Th. Weepest thou at comfort? Is deceit so dear
To mortals, that to know good cannot match
The joy of a delusion whatsoe'er?
Deid. What joy was mine shame must forbid to tell.
Th. Gods count it shame to be deceived: but men
Are shamed not by delusion of the gods.
Deid. Then ye know nothing or do not respect.
Th. Why what is this thou makest? the more ye have loved
The more have ye delighted, and the joy
I never grudged thee; tho' there was not one
In all my company of sea-born nymphs,
Who did not daily pray me, with white arms
Raised in the blue, to let her guard my son.
And for his birthright he might well have taken
The service of their sportive train, and lived
On some fair desert isle away from men
Like a young god in worship and gay love.
But since he is mortal, for his mortal mate
I chose out thee; to whom now were he lost,
I would not blame thy well-deservèd tears:

But lo, I am come to give thee joy, to call
Thee daughter, and prepare thee for the sight
Of such a lover, as no lady yet
Hath sat to await in chamber or in bower
On any wallèd hill or isle of Greece;
Nor yet in Asian cities, whose dark queens
Look from the latticed casements over seas
Of hanging gardens; nor doth all the world
Hold a memorial; not where Ægypt mirrors
The great smile of her kings and sunsmit fanes
In timeless silence: none hath been like him;
And all the giant stones, which men have piled
Upon the illustrious dead, shall crumble and join
The desert dust, ere his high dirging Muse
Be dispossessèd of the throne of song.
Await him here. While I thy willing maids
Will lead apart, that they may learn what share
To take in thy rejoicing. Follow me!

Ch. Come, come—we follow—we obey thee gladly—
We long to learn, goddess, what thou canst teach.

[*Exeunt Th. and Chor.*

Deid. Rejoice, she bids me. Ah me, tho' all heaven spake,
I should weep bitterly. My tears, my shame
Will never leave me. Never now, nevermore
Can I find credit of grace, nor as a rock

Stand 'twixt my maids and evil; even not deserving
My father's smile. Why honour we the gods,
Who reck not of our honour? How hath she,
Self-styled a goddess, mocked me, not respecting
Maidenly modesty; but in the path
Of grace, wherein I thought to walk enstated
High as my rank without reproach, she hath set
A snare for every step; that day by day,
From morn to night, I might do nothing well;
But by most innocent seeming be betrayed
To what most wounds a shamefast life, yielding
To a man's unfeignèd feigning; nay nor stayed
Until I had given,—alas, how oft!—
My cheek to his lips, my body to his arms;
And thinking him a maid as I myself,
Have loved, kissed, and embraced him as a maid.
O wretched, not to have seen what was so plain!
Here on this bank no later than this morn
Was I beguiled. There is no cure, no cure.
I'll close my eyes for ever, nor see again
The things I have seen, nor be what I have been.

[*Covers her face weeping.*

Enter Achilles.

Ach. The voices that were here have ceased. Ah, there!

Not gone. 'Tis she, and by my cast-off robe
Sitting alone. I must speak comfort to her,
Whoe'er I seem. O Deidamia, see!
Pyrrha is found. Weep not for her. I tell thee
Thy Pyrrha is safe. Despair not. Nay, look up.
Dost thou not know my voice? 'Tis I myself.
Look up, I am Pyrrha.—Ah, now what prayer or plea
Made on my knees can aid me—If thou knowst all
And wilt not look on me? Yet if thou hearest
Thou wilt forgive. Nay, if thou lovedst me not,
Or if I had wronged thee, thou wouldst scorn me now.
Thou dost not look. I am not changed. I loved thee
As like a maiden as I knew: if more
Was that a fault? Now as I am Achilles
Revealed to-day to lead the Greeks to Troy,
I count that nothing and bow down to thee
Who hast made me fear,—
Let me unveil thy eyes: tho' thou wouldst hide me,
Hide not thyself from me. If gentle force
Should show me that 'tis love that thou wouldst hide . . .
And love I see. Look on me.

Deid. (*embracing*). Ah Pyrrha, Pyrrha!

Ach. Thou dost forgive.

Deid. I never dreamed the truth.

Ach. And wilt not now look on me!

Deid. I dare not look.

Ach. What dost thou fear? A monster! I am not changed
Save but my dress, and that an Amazon
Might wear.
Deid. O, I see all.
Ach. But who hath told thee?
Deid. There came one here much like thee when we called,
Who said she was a goddess and thy mother.
Ach. 'Twas she that hid me in my strange disguise,
Fearing the oracle.
Deid. She praised thee well,
And said that thou wouldst come. . .
Ach. What didst thou fear,
Hiding thine eyes?
Deid. I cannot speak the name.
Be Pyrrha still.
Ach. Be that my name with thee.
Yet hath thy father called me son Achilles.
Deid. He knows?
Ach. There's nought to hide: but let us hence.
He is coming hither, and with him my foe.
Let them not find us thus, and thee in tears.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter Lycomedes, Ulysses, Diomede, and Abas.

Lyc. It may be so, or it may not be so:
You have done me an honest service 'gainst your will,
And must not wrest it to a false conclusion.
I bid you be my guests, and with your presence
Honour the marriage, which ye have brought about.
Ye need not tarry long.
Ul. Each hour is long
Which holds the Argive ships chained to the shore.
This is no time for marriage.
Lyc. There's time for all;
A time for wooing and a time for warring:
And such a feast of joy as offers now
Ye shall not often see. Scyros shall show you
What memory may delight in 'twixt the frays
Of bloody battle.
Dio. I am not made for feasts.
I join the cry to arms. But make your bridal
To-night, and I'll abide it.
Lyc. I'll have't to-night.
So shall Achilles' finding and his wedding
Be on one day. And hark! there's music tells me
That others guess my mind.

Enter Chorus with Ach. and Deid. following.

Chorus.

Now the glorious sun is sunk in the west,
And night with shadowy step advances :
As we,—to the newly betrothed our song addrest,
With musical verse and dances,
In the order of them who established rites of old
For maidens to sing this song,—
Pray the gifts of heaven to gifts of gold,
Joy and a life long.

Ach. Good king and father, see thy daughter come
To hear thee call me son.

Lyc. Son if I call thee,
I understand not yet, and scarce believe
The wonders of this day. And thou, my daughter,
Ever my pride and prayer, hast far outrun
My hope of thy good fortune. Blessed be ye both :
The gods have made your marriage ; let the feast
Be solemnized to-night ; our good guests here
Whose zeal hath caused our joy, I have bid to share it.

Chorus.

We live well-ruled by an honoured king,
Beloved of the gods, in a happy isle ;
Where merry winds of the gay sea bring
No foe to our shore, and the heavens smile

On a peaceful folk secure from fear,
Who gather the fruits of the earth at will,
And hymn their thanks to the gods, and rear
Their laughing babes unmindful of ill.
And ever we keep a feast of delight,
The betrothal of hearts, when spirits unite,
Creating an offspring of joy, a treasure
Unknown to the bad, for whom
The gods foredoom
The glitter of pleasure,
And a dark tomb.

Blessèd therefore O newly betrothed are ye,
Tho' happy to-day ye be,
Your happier times ye yet shall see.
We make our prayer to the gods.

The sun shall prosper the seasons' yield
With fuller crops for the wains to bear,
And feed our flocks in fold and field
With wholesome water and sweetest air.
Plenty shall empty her golden horn,
And grace shall dwell on the brows of youth,
And love shall come as the joy of morn,
To waken the eyes of pride and truth.

Blessèd therefore thy happy folk are we.
Tho' happy to-day we be,

Our happier times are yet to see.
We render praise to the gods;

But chiefest of all in the highest height
To Love that sitteth in timeless might,
That tameth evil, and sorrow ceaseth.
And now we wish you again,
Again and again,
His joy that encreaseth,
And a long reign.

Ach. Stay, stay! and thou, good king, and all here, hear me.
I would be measured by my best desire,
And that's for peace and love, and the delights
Your song hath augured: but to all men fate
Apportions a mixed lot, and 'twas for me
Foreshown that peace and honour lay apart,
Wherever pleasure: and to-day's event
Questions your hope. I was for this revealed,
To lead the Argive battle against Troy:
Thither I go; whence to return or not
Is out of sight, but yet my marriage-making
Enters with better promise on my life
Thus hand in hand with glorious enterprise.
After some days among you I must away,
Tho' 'tis not far.

Ul. Well said! So art thou bound.
Dio. The war that hung so long will now begin.
Lyc. I ask one month, Achilles: grant one moon:
They that could wait so long may longer wait.

Chorus.

1.

Go not, go not, Achilles; is all in vain?
Is this the fulfilment of long delight,
The promise of favouring heaven,
The praise of our song,
The choice of Thetis for thee,
Thy merry disguise,
And happy betrothal?
We pray thee, O we beseech thee, all,
Son of Thetis, we counsel well,
Do not thy bride this wrong.

2.

For if to-day thou goest, thou wilt go far,
Alas, from us thy comrades away,
To a camp of revengeful men,
The accursed war
By warning fate forbidden,
To angry disdain,
A death unworthy.

We pray thee, O we beseech thee, all,
Son of Peleus, we counsel well,
This doom the oracle told.

Lyc. What said the oracle?
Ach. It darkly boded
That glory should be death.
Lyc. And so may be:
Nay, very like. Yet men who would live well,
Weigh not these riddles, but unfold their life
From day to day. Do thou as seemeth best,
Nor fear mysterious warnings of the powers.
But, if my voice can reckon with thee at all,
I'll tell thee what myself I have grown to think:
That the best life is oft inglorious.
Since the perfecting of ourselves, which seems
Our noblest task, may closelier be pursued
Away from camps and cities and the mart
Of men, where fame, as it is called, is won,
By strife, ambition, competition, fashion,
Ay, and the prattle of wit, the deadliest foe
To sober holiness, which, as I think,
Loves quiet homes, where nature laps us round
With musical silence and the happy sights
That never fret; and day by day the spirit
Pastures in liberty, with a wide range

Of peaceful meditation, undisturbed.
All which can Scyros offer if thou wilt.—
Ul. This speech is idle, thou art bound to me.
Ach. I hear you all: and lest it should be said
I once was harsh and heedless, where such wrong
Were worse than cowardice, I now recall
Whate'er I have said. I will not forth to Troy:
I will abide in Scyros, and o'erlook
The farms and vineyards, and be lessoned well
In government of arts, and spend my life
In love and ease, and whatsoever else
Our good king here hath praised—I will do this
If my bride bid me. Let her choose for me;
Her word shall rule me. If she set our pleasure
Above my honour, I will call that duty,
And make it honourable, and so do well.
But, as I know her, if she bid me go
Where fate and danger call, then I will go,
And so do better: and very sure it is,
Pleasure is not for him who pleasure serves.
Deid. Achilles, son of Thetis! As I love thee,
I say, go forth to Troy.
Ach. Praised be the Gods,
Who have made my long desire my love's command!
Ch. Alas! We have no further plea. Alas!
Her ever-venturous spirit forecasts no ill.

Lyc. Go, win thy fame, my son; I would not stay thee.
Thou art a soldier born. But circumstance
Demands delay, which thou wilt grant.
Ach. And thus
To-night may be the feast. To-morrow morn
Do thou, Ulysses, sail to Aulis, there
Prepare them for my coming. If, Diomede,
Thou wilt to Achaia to collect my men,
The time thou usest I can fitly spend,
And for some days banish the thought of war.
Dio. I will go for thee, prince.
Lyc. 'Tis settled so.
Stand we no longer here: night falls apace.
Come to the palace, we will end this day,
As it deserves, never to be forgot.

NOTES

THE FIRST PART OF NERO

This play was not intended for the stage, as the rest of my plays are. It was written as an exercise in dramatic qualities other than scenic; and had its publication been contemplated, I should have been more careful not to deserve censure in one or two places: these however I have not thought it worth while to erase or correct. Owing to its inordinate length I have found it necessary, so that the volumes of this series might be of uniform size, to couple with it the shortest of the other plays. Hence

ACHILLES IN SCYROS

is here out of order. Instead of standing second it should come fifth, that is after *The Christian Captives*. The following note is taken from the first edition.

Note to Achilles in Scyros.—After I had begun this play I came by chance on *Calderon's* play on the same subject, *El Monstruo de los Jardines*. The monster is

Achilles; the gardens the same. Excepting an expression or two I found nothing that it suited me to use, and I should not have recorded the circumstance, if it were not that *Calderon's* play seemed to me to contain strong evidence that he had read *The Tempest*. This observation cannot be new, but I have never met with it; so I offer it to my readers, thinking it will interest them as it did me.

El Monstruo de los Jardines opens with a storm at sea, and shipwreck of royal persons, similar as it is inferior to *Shakespeare's* (but compare also the Devil's shipwreck in the second act of *El magicio prodigioso*, which may be read in *Shelley's* translation). *Stephano* has his counterpart,

> *Un cofrade de Baco, que ha salido,*
> *Por no hacerle traicion, del mar á nado*
> *Pues el no beber agua le ha escapado,*

and the whole play is then on a supposed desert island, which turns out to be strangely peopled. There is the monster *Achilles*, who in many respects remembers *Caliban*, and is even addressed as *Señor monstruo*: '*Monsieur Monster.*' There is *Thetis*, who is to her nymphs as *Prospero* to his spirits; with musical enchantments, and voices in the air, and even a *fantastico bajél*. *Calderon* has moreover hit

upon the same device of imitative fancy as tempted *Dryden* in like sad case, and pictured a man who had never seen a woman. The island is wandered on by the prince and his suite, and one of them says of it *Republica es entera*, &c. A curious reader might find more than I have here noticed: but *Calderon* is as far from sympathy with *Shakespeare*, as he is from the Greek story, with his drums and trumpets and *El gran Sofi*.

There is a passage in my *Achilles* (*l.* 518 *and foll.*) which is copied from *Calderon*: but this is after *Muley's* well-known speech in the *Principe Constante* (see note to *The Christian Captives*); which is quoted in most books on *Calderon*. In my short play, which runs on without change of scene or necessary pause, I have had the act and scene divisions indicated by greater and lesser spaces in the printing.*

R. B., 1890.

* Not followed in this edition. 1901.